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Risque

Stories

No. 6

In this Issue:

"The Blonde with
Two Big Ones"

...

*"Anything.
Anywhere.
Anytime"*



Also
The Spicy Westerners
by Will Murray

RISQUE STORIES

July 1988

*

Number Six

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FOREPLAY

It has been tons of titillating fun publishing Risque Stories, Cryptic Publications' salacious salute to the spicy pulp tradition, but this sixth sexy issue is our last. Risque Stories was the first of the companion magazines we published after Cryptic Publications began in 1981 with Crypt of Cthulhu. In succeeding years we have come to publish a wide range of pulp-related magazines, some intentionally short-lived, others more in the nature of ongoing series. We simply cannot find time to keep all of them going at once, especially as we have ever-new projects up our sleeves. Actually, as some of you know, we had once planned to retire Risque after its third issue. As it turns out, we've had twice the fun we originally planned. (Risque readers will want to keep a lookout for our one-shot parody/salute to the Men's Adventure genre called Man's Guts, planned for 1989.

There'll be some wild stuff in that one!)

Our last lustful issue includes two substantial fiction pieces: Sidney Allinson's spicy detective tale, "The Blonde with Two Big Ones," and Pierre Comtois' "Anything, Anywhere, Anytime," an exotic Asian adventure. Our scholarly series of Spicy studies continues with Will Murray's "The Spicy West-erns" and Audrey Parente's "Slippery as an Eel." Ribald reviews and lewd letters abound as well. And what would an issue of Risque Stories be without a new adventure of Julie de Grandin by Will Murray and Robert H. Knox? Of course, you may have to take our word for all this, since we're not absolutely sure you'll be able to get past that pulse-quickenning Steve Fabian cover!

Robert M. Price
Editor

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the blonde with two big ones

by Sidney Allinson

Lush female curves outside threw and interesting set of shadows on the pebble-glass door of my office. Feet up on the desk, I enjoyed how the reverse lettering, "P. X. Maxim, Private Detective," was outlined by her contours. So full, so firm, so fully packed--like the radio commercials for Chesterfield cigarettes. I reached for one, crumpled the empty pack disgustedly, and went back to sucking on a sticky bottle of Coke. Whoever she was, she'd been tapping her high heels up and down the hall outside for the past few minutes. Long enough for me to get curious. I decided to let her make up her own mind, though, rather than make any unnecessary moves in this heat.

Even at five o'clock of a May afternoon, West Los Angeles was a furnace. Low sunlight blazed through the fan-shaped windows, keeping my office as full of hot air as a Sacramento politician. I scanned a few headlines in my limp copy of the LA Times. The Brooklyn Dodgers were slugging it out with the New York Giants at Ebbetts Field; Franklin D. Roosevelt was giving Herr Hitler the raspberry in his radio fireside chats; the Limeys were fighting the Krauts at some place called Dunkirk; and there'd been another sex-slaying in Pacific Palisades. Yeah, the City of Angels. Gruber's Homicide boys were going to be busier than ever. I took a last pull of warm Coke, wished I could afford bourbon instead, and slung the bottle in the trash-can. BOING! That made the waiting female silhouette jump. Bounce, in fact. Then she threw her shoulders back, also a

nice effect, and turned the handle.

She didn't so much as walk, as come towards me in sections--a tall, leggy blonde in a sleeveless green dress that looked as if it was put on with collodion instead of zippers. Just watching the undulating way she moved on white spike-heels was a rare treat for these bloodshot peepers of mine. She had so much class, she'd obviously gotten into my office by mistake. Before she realized it, and took a powder, I made a quick inventory. The golden haired one had a Jean Harlow body to match. Her thin summer dress strained at a thrusting pair of firm, high-set breasts, and lovingly encased the sleekest hips and backside this side of the chorus-line at Radio City Music Hall. Blue eyes snapped, reminding me to stop catching flies. Then, regardless, she flashed a wide smile and breathed, "Mister Maxim? The detective?"

"None other, ma'am," I deadpanned, and quickly dusted off the chair kept for all-too-rare clients.

The girl moved over in an expensive cloud of Mitsoukou perfume, the kind you smell on ritzy dames anklng into the Brown Derby nightclub on Hollywood Boulevard. "Oh, good. You've been very highly recommended." She set and crossed those incredible gams, with a hissing of silk hose that shot my temperature up about another hundred degrees.

"I was?" True, I've had my moments--but recommended? "Who by?"

"I mean . . . those newspaper stories. How you handled the Suarez kidnapping. And that awful extortion case in la Jolla."

"Oh, yeah." Both in the past year. Only, the Suarez kid ended up dead, and I never did solve that La Jolla job. Result, two real unhappy clients. My two worst cases, as it happens, and spread all over the town's daily news-rags. But, maybe there really is no such thing as bad publicity, except no publicity, and people do only remember what they want to. Like this beautiful bimbo, for instance.

"Obviously, you know my name, ma'am." I paused meaningfully.

"Oh, I'm sorry." She laughed, a low, gurgling sound the Hays Office would have banned from any movie. "I'm Helga Hellstrom." She peeled off a little white glove and let my paw hold her slim red-topped hand for a moment. I reluctantly gave it back, and she began fiddling with her clutch-purse. Here come the usual preliminaries, when clients lie to you a little. Or a lot.

"I understand you're not afraid of anything, Mister Maxim."

"Well, maybe my ex-wife's mother." I watched her closely for signs she was razzing me. Not a hint.

Innocently, she looked around my crummy office, taking in the mussed daybed, long-empty mickeys, food leftovers, and sundry other signs of prosperity. "I do hope you're free at the moment. For hire, right away."

"Unh . . ."

"Frankly, it might be a rather dangerous assignment, Mister Maxim. So naturally I'd expect to pay you well. Perhaps we'd better discuss your fees . . ."

"Perhaps we talk about what kind of job it is, first."

She shrugged, her full breasts shifting with only slightly less effect on me than the San Francisco earthquake. "Bodyguarding. For my sister . . . She's been threatened! That horrible man! If she refuses to . . . sleep with him, he's going to kill her--!" Like

always, the story came spilling out in a rush. "Ohhhh. It's so terrible!" She fished for a tiny cambric hanky and dabbed and brimming baby-blues.

"Okay, take it easy, Miss." I'm not much good around young frails when they cry.

"My sister's in awful danger! You have to protect her!"

"No problem, Miss." I found a note-pad, flipped a dead fly off it, and got my HB ready. "Just for a start, who is she? Live in L.A.?"

"Her name is Ursula. Ursula Gunderssdottir." She gave a loud sniff. "She has a lovely home in Geneva Estates. Oh, please, I'm at my wit's--!"

"Okay, sure." I blinked. "Mind if we slow down a little? She's your sister but she's called, uh, Gunders-Whatever. That being her married name, I gather."

"Oh, no. Ursula's my half-sister, really. She was born Gundersdottir." My lovely new client spelled out her sister's long name for me while I wrote. When I finished all that, she said brightly, "Her married name's Rolf now, though."

I let my breath out, slow. "Her husband's full name is . . .?"

"I told you. Rolf."

"Rolf what?"

"Rolf Rolf." It made him sound like a Doberman. "It's Icelandic. We all are. Well, via Hecla, Manitoba. In Canada. That's where our folks came when the big volcano blew up in Iceland." She re-crossed silky thighs. "I'm really called Hellstromsdottir, myself, but I shortened it, you see."

"Lady . . ." I massaged my temples. I suddenly needed that bourbon like nobody's business. "Let's leave the names lie for a minute. This guy making the threats. Any idea who he is?"

"Oh, yes, of course. He's Mister Snark."

Progress. "Great. Now how'd he meet your sister?"

"At our church. He's head deacon there."

I'm a patient guy, and she was one gorgeous tomato, but my head was starting to hurt. I put the pad down carefully. "Let me get this straight. Your sister has received a letter threatening sexual assault and murder. It was sent by your local church deacon. Is that right?" She nodded, tearily. "You actually read this letter yourself?"

She lowered her swimming eyes, and murmured, "Every word. It said, 'I'll be calling you to stay overnight with me at the Gaylord Hotel next weekend. If you refuse, I'll kill you for sure!'"

"Lady, I have to ask. Your sister and this Snark guy. They ever been, you know, an item?"

"Absolutely not! Why, my sister's a happily married woman. . .!"

I nodded, trying to look polite. Right now, I could be wearing fancy hundred-dollar suits and driving a twelve-cylinder LaSalle DeLuxe off of the failings of 'happily married women'. That is, if I wasn't so dead set against handling sleaze-O divorce investigations. Hell, a one-time ace Homicide dick needs to hang onto some standards, even if he is just a lousy shamus now.

"Sure, but I'm paid to ask that kind of question. Anyway, he ever make a play for Ursula before?"

"Never! But he does have a certain reputation among the Lutheran ladies. They say Lars, well, fancies himself. . ."

"Good-looking guy, is he?"

She dimpled, "Frankly, he's a big fat slob."

I mentally filed that under 'physical description of suspect', and asked her for addresses of all concerned. Then, "What's her husband's reaction to all this?"

"Poor Rolf's so mad, he wanted to go around and beat Mister Snark to a pulp! But he has his business reputation to think about. Invest-

ments. Very conservative, you know. That's why I begged him to let us hire you to handle things." She pressed both hands to her well-upholstered heart. "Will you, Mister Maxim? Please?"

"Well, I could go out and talk to her. Maybe lean on this Snark character."

"No, you're not to speak to either one!" Red spots flared on her high cheekbones. She said more quietly, "Just discreetly keep Ursula safe from harm." The bulbing white purse snapped open. Among the powder compact, comb, tissues, and billfold, I caught the chromium gleam of a little automatic. Twenty-five caliber Baby Browning, by the look of it. My new client pushed it aside and rummaged around in there.

"Now, about your fee."

I cleared my throat, and spoke firmly. "Fifteen dollars a day." She smiled, and started pulling a couple of bills out, so I added hastily, "Plus expenses." She gave that sexy laugh, and I plunged, "A week in advance. . ."

Deliberately, she laid two one thousand dollar bills on my desk. "Now, Mister Maxim, we want you to make absolutely sure of my dear sister's safety." I stared fascinated at the Abe Lincolns. I'd only seen Ten-C notes once, on a training course at the Treasury Department in Washington. "We'd like you to watch over her for the next few weeks. Especially whenever Rolf's away."

"Uh. . . thanks. I guarantee it, Miss, er--"

She stood up, real close, I could smell her minty breath. "Much too formal. Call me Helga." Her soft hand rested on mine for a moment. "And you? I guess the 'X' stands for Xavier. What's the 'P' mean?"

It happens to stand for Percival, but anybody who's asked before usually got a knuckle sandwich. With her, I grunted, "Folks just call me Max."

"I will. First thing tomorrow." She sashayed towards the door, her tight skirt moving like two rabbits fighting in a sack. "Bye, Max."

I was still thinking about that classy chassiss twenty minutes later in Sorley's Bar & Grill. I downed fifty cents worth of the joint's not-so-genial host's best Kentucky bourbon to steady my nerves. Then I ordered another with a beer chaser, just to wet down a throat dry as the Mojave. First I'd had to calm Moe Sorley down by paying off the old tab I owed. He'd laughed like a drain at first when I asked him to split one of the big bills. Not seeing denominations that high too often--especially from a guy who's usually broker than Jack Benny's valet--he examined the dough closer than if it was his dear old mother's last will and testament. Finally convinced it wasn't Confederate money, he just shook his head, rasped, "Who'd ya molder, Shamus?", and slipped me a big handful of dough in change. I let the beer slide down my parched throat. Suddenly, I was rich. The only question was--why?

I went over to the corner booth and blew another five cents on a 'phone call. "Gruber. Homicide." A Voice like a cement-mixer with laryngitis. "Oh, it's the big Pee Eye! Taking time off from peeping through keyholes, huh? Or maybe calling from the drunk-tank in Tiajuana?"

One thing you could say for my old boss, the Lieutenant, he never changed. A consistent sore-head. "Listen, Gruber, I want you to look something up for me."

"Sure. A little friendly free assistance, courtesy of the taxpayers, huh? Maybe I just peek at how many times the mayor's son's had speeding tickets fixed. Or snitch inside dope on another big-time kidnapping case--like the one you was gonna crack last year and hand me on a plate!"

"Come on, Gruber. I don't often

ask. Just a little off-the-record check into a guy called Lars Snark. Lives out Geneva Estates way."

"What's he done? Shot Mussolini, or just hustled the Governor's wife?"

"Gimme a break, Gruber. I'm not asking you to suborn the Police Act. Just see what's in the files on this guy for me."

He did some more routine growling, but finally said he'd look into it within the next couple of months, and hung up. Then it was about time I paid to get my car out of hock, and went body-guarding out Laurel Canyon way. I refused another drink from Sorley at the bar, but picked up a pint of sour mash to go. After all, it could get cold in them thar hills, even in May.

The Rolf place was imposing even for swank Geneva Estates, a neighborhood so isolated and exclusive there were coyotes yipping in the dark hills all around. I coasted my freshly de-repossessed '36 Frazer Nash the last few hundred yards, lights off, and parked keep in shadow across from the big double gates. First, I cased the area. Only a few lights were on in the mansion and a big black car stood in the driveway. Nothing seemed to be out of line, so I walked quietly up the circular driveway. Mud squelched underfoot, wet seeping through the dollar-sized hole in my right shoe. Some clown had left a garden-hose running. I was scraping my soles clean on the front steps when a woman screamed inside the house.

I flung myself up the steps just in time to carom off a big guy coming through the front doors. I jabbed a stiff-arm, just hard enough to slow him down. He collapsed with a loud "Woof!", but bounced right back up at me. I got a quick glance at a bulky six-footer, but sloppy with it. He was all spiffed up in a white doub-

le-breasted suit with four-inch lapels that made him look even wider than he was. Dude or not, he threw a haymaker that could have parted my noggin from my neck if his fist had connected. I threw in a couple of good ones into his gut, and felt muscle under the fat. His dukes tried to remodel my choppers, so I mashed him one in the snoot, with a looping left hook even Joe Louis would have been proud of. This time, the guy stayed down. I stepped back, and cocked fist. "You want some more, buster?"

He groaned, snuffling like a bulldog, holding out his manicured mitts to show the dust-up was over. After he got a couple of breaths, he managed to yell a routine "How dare you!" He brushed pudgy hands over his nice jacket, a pouty-looking guy with a small, wet mouth. A Ringer for that movie heavy, Laird Cregar. I grabbed his silk necktie and swung him inside the open marble hall. "You hurt her, you're dead!" I gritted. His black-grape eyes got angry some more, so I rapped another jab under his ribs to keep him in line. I'd dragged him, spluttering, as far as the sweeping curved staircase, when we came face to face with a surprised-looking Negro maid. "Bodine!" my pudgy prisoner yelled. "Call the police!"

I pulled his knot tighter for silence. "Quick, is Missus Rolf okay?"

She pointed calmly up the wide stairs. "Just fine, far's I could see. Off to bed just this minute." She gave my prisoner a look like he belonged under a rock. "Right after she told Mister Snark to leave." She put a lot of venom in the "Mister". I reluctantly let go Fatso, who matched Helga's description of Snark. He tore his collar open to gasp some air. "I'll have the law on you for this!"

"Yeah? We can show 'em your love-letters at the same time." His eyes went blank. "Eh? . . . What is all this?"

"Bodine?" A cool voice called downstairs. "Who's there?"

"Sure you're okay, Missus Rolf?" I bawled. "The name's Maxim. Your sister hired me as your bodyguard."

"Perfectly, thank you." The voice was calm, carefully modulated.

"Ursula," Snark piped up. "Are you responsible for this thug's behavior?"

The voice came closer. "Really, girl, can't you deal with them . . .?" She came round the bend of the stairs, an eye-popping sight in a silver satin negligee. She was belting the sash, pulling a long shiny robe skin-tight across rounded arrogantly jutting breasts and a nipped-in waist. The gown flowed open from then on, revealing shapely legs outlined under a matching nightdress. I whistled silently. If ever a body needed guarding, it was hers.

On high-heeled mules, Ursula strutted elegantly down the steps, a whole lot of shaking going on. Without looking away, I knew Snark wouldn't be missing a jiggle. I reached sideways, flattened my hand across Fatso's face, and shoved. "Beat it, punk!" I didn't even watch him leave.

"Masterful, aren't we?" Something like humor stirred behind the cool, glittering jewels of her blue eyes. They were the same color as her sister's, but without Helga's warmth. Before I could speak, she dismissed Bodine, but told her to stay within call. Trying to breathe easy, I trailed after Ursula Rolf leading me into the drawing room, her curved hips swaying with oiled perfection.

Her slim hand indicated I should sit, and I lowered myself into a gold-painted chair that looked like its last occupant was Louis the Fourteenth. "Well, Mister Maxim?" The ice-lady didn't waste time.

"What was he doing here, ma'am?" Two could play hard-nose.

Scornfully, she twisted her beautiful kisser. "Trying to smooth

things over, I suppose."

"Can I see his letter?"

"I burned it, of course."

"Too bad. Could have been useful evidence."

"When?" Perfect eyebrows arched even higher. "It's scarcely going to court, you know. Neither of us wants that . . ." Unconsciously, she gestured to the photograph nearby in a silver frame. The lucky guy in the middle wore a white suit, two-tone shoes, and a black moustache like Rudolph Valentino. Not exactly your average investment banker. He was smirking at the camera, arms around two gorgeous girls--Helga and Ursula--one on each side. Each of his hands dug into soft flesh below a plump breast. Helga was looking away modestly with eyes lowered to show the pose certainly wasn't her idea.

"My husband simply wants Lars, er, quietly discouraged."

"Yeah? Well, I could do that easier without the brakes Miss Hellstrom put on me." She frowned, looking puzzled. Then I drawled, "Speaking of discouragement, ma'am, you'd be safer not letting Snark back in the house. Especially..." I ran my eyes over the slinky silk outfit.

Some color rose in the porcelain cheeks. "I just changed! You surely don't think I'd greet him like this?"

KA-POW! KA-POW! Two slugs blasted window-glass into the room, hummed past my ear, and blew the ceramic table lamp into a million bits. Ever the gentleman, I threw myself on top of Ursula. Ordinarily I'd have been glad of the excuse. As it was, I was busy pulling my .38 Police Positive, and loosing off three fast return shots through the smashed window--BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!

Fat chance of hitting anybody, but the idea was to scare the pants off the bushwhacker outside. I thumbed back the hammer again, and settled down for a long wait. No

more shots came, and I was just getting comfortable on the plush female curves when Ursula said coolly, "Thanks, but I think it's safe enough for you to get off me now . . ." This broad definitely had style.

I grabbed for the ivory 'phone. "Couple of squad cars will make us feel less lonely." A slim hand pressed down on mine. Not even a tremor. "Absolutely no police, Mister Maxim." Blue eyes watched me clammy. "Please . . . I think whoever it was has gone away now."

We were still lying close on the floor. I reached to hang up, squirming across her softness, making a meal of it. Just then a guy burst in, roaring mad. "What the hell's going on?" Husbands always seem to catch me at a time like that. "What d'you think you're doing with my wife?"

"It's called saving my life, dear." Then Ursula came suddenly aware that most of a pair of luscious creamy globes were spilling from her mussed, open peignoir. She hastily pulled the shades on flesh city, and asked, "Didn't you hear the shooting, Rolf?"

He still looked like wishing a slug had caught me. As if my rolling around on the rug with his wife was more important than the lingering stink of gunpowder.

"Was them shots, Miz Rolf!" The maid trembled in the doorway.

"That's right, Bodine."

"But . . . is anyone hurt?"

"Dammit, you stupid girl--we're fine!" Rolf snarled. "Look, grab some watermelon and take the night off--now!"

"Oh, I'm leavin', for sure!"

The girl scurried off, the kitchen door slamming shut. Rolf wheeled on me. "You, too! Out!"

"Look, somebody just tried to blast your wife--!"

"We all know who that was! Look, Maxim, I'm perfectly capable of looking after her now." What looked suspiciously like a gat bulged under

his tailored armpit. "You'd be more useful digging up some evidence against Snark! Then, come back on duty tomorrow, around noon. But for now, beat it!"

I gave him a white-eyed glare, took a deep breath, then swallowed my well-paid pride. I glanced at Ursula. "You be okay?"

She nodded slowly, her beautiful face impassive. So much for Sir Galahad's reward. I turned to leave, then her voice came, "Max . . . thank you for looking after me." Not cool at all.

Rolf's car was parked outside the gates, away from the mud. I caught up with Bodine farther along the road, lifted her suitcase into the back, and gave her a lift into the city. She was quitting her job, as of then, and nobody could blame her. When I got back to my office, I flaked on the bed, expecting to hit the zzz's in seconds. Instead, I lay there, killing the bourbon. Then, late as it was, I called Helga. Her low voice made a pleased gasp of my name. "Max, are you all right?"

"Pretty well . . . Guess you heard from your sister."

"It must have been terrible! Thank God you were there!"

With a two grand retainer, it didn't seem smart to say it had been dumb luck. Only Superman's faster than a speeding bullet. "I'd have stayed, but Rolf-Rolf sent me home-home." She managed to giggle. "Listen," I said, "sure you don't want me to lean on Lars a tad?"

"Just dying to use those big muscles, aren't you?" Somehow, we both knew what she really meant. "But not yet, though. You can help me dig up some dirt on him instead. Ruin his reputation, put him out of favor with the church, and people he does business with. You know."

"Yep." Too well. I never liked it, though. "Catch is, I got to be on guard tomorrow."

"Rolf won't be driving to San

Diego until noon. We'll have plenty of time to dig out what I have in mind . . ."

"Sure you don't want me to handle it alone?"

"No; besides, I'd really like to see you again, Max."

"Uh, you're the boss."

"Pick you up around ten-thirty, then. 'Bye, Max. Sweet dreams . . ." The phone hissed in my ear, like silk stockings rubbing together.

For a long time I lay watching the neon sign outside flashing on and off, little wheels in my head spinning 'round and 'round. Finally I slipped off to la-la-land. What I dreamed about was blazing roscoes with gun-smoke smelling of Mitsoukou perfume.

There was a big cicada buried in my pillow. It kept buzzing away until I realized it was the office phone stuffed under there. When I reached for it, the yellow California sunrise blasted me right in the eyeballs, and I groaned. An entire mariachi band started blaring away full blast inside my skull. I'd killed the rest of the sour mash last night. Now it was returning the compliment. The cicada kept buzzing, until I managed to unhook the phone. "Uhuh?"

"Shooting heard somewhere out Geneva way last night," a voice snarled. "Happen to know anything about it, Shamus?"

I jammed the pedestal mouthpiece between my knees, cradled the earphone under my neck, squinted at my watch, and collapsed backwards. Even at seven a.m. Gruber managed to sound full of mean energy. Maybe been working over some sex-killer suspect with a rubber hose. That always used to cheer him up.

"Hey, you know I always level with you, Lieutenant." It drew a sour laugh, and he grunted, "You hold something out on me, I'll lift that crummy gumshoe licence, pronto! Comprendre?"

"Come on, Gruber. What've you got?"

"Took me all of five minutes. Snark filed a burglary complaint last week. Claims somebody tossed his apartment. Took some cash, liquor, and--get this--one of his guns."

If my dry lips were up to it, I'd have whistled. "Yeah? What kind?"

"Lahti. That's a--"

"Big Finnish job. Nine millimeter. Looks like a Luger."

"Whatever. Anyway, he made a big fuss. Says he won all kinds of target trophies with it."

"You said 'one of'?"

"He's a gun nut. Has a dozen of 'em in his apartment."

"So how come they took only one?"

"Maybe a choosy burglar."

Gruber told me Snark was clean, otherwise. No rap sheet, anyway. Owned a pricey Scandinavian furniture store. Evidently, being a skirt-chaser didn't interfere with his church fund-raising, either. The lieutenant growled a couple more warnings of what would happen if I held out on him with information about a felony, and hung up. I stared at the phone a long time, until finally I recalled an idea the sour mash gave me around two ay-em.

I dug out a dog-eared Detective Association Red Book, and flipped to the international section. Even if it was a back copy, not having paid my annual dues lately, the listings were still probably pretty current. There were five private eyes listed under Winnipeg, which was the capital city of Manitoba, Canada. I picked the first name and asked the operator to put a call in to it. She said it would take about an hour, which was pretty fast for a long-distance call, especially as they were at war up there. I checked my watch and decided to get cleaned up, meanwhile.

I took out the roll of over \$900 and the remaining one grand note,

still sweaty from being carried around all night. I hid the single big bill among sheets under my desk blotter, but pocketed the fifties and twenties just to feel loaded for a change. Then I made the effort to shave, and had to scrub my hands to get rid of some dye crud from Bodine's old suitcase. It felt good, somehow, to cling into my one good suit. The blue seersucker, with a short-sleeve white shirt and a black knit tie. We society dicks like to meet lady clients in style. I went out for coffee and flapjacks before my call came through.

His name was MacDonald, ex-Royal Canadian Mounted Police, which sounded reliable. He was pretty nice about things, considering I was calling at six in the morning, to him--Manitoba being three hours behind Pacific Time, which I'd forgot. He said as it'd be the last P.I. job he'd be doing for a while, he'd get on it right away. He laughed when I mentioned the area of inquiry. "Funny. That town's slap where I'm headed myself next weekend. Off for pilot training with the RCAF at Gimli Airfield."

We talked terms, which he cracked was a lot more than what he'd be getting from now on, in the Royal Canadian Air Force. He promised to call within 24 hours, sounding awful cheerful for a guy who would soon be paid a few measly bucks a day to risk his neck in a Wellington bomber. I sat there for a sec., thinking what a cockeyed old world it was--me investigating a skirt-chasing trigger-happy deacon, and MacDonald off to fight a war. Ah well, a man's gotta do what a man's gotta do.

A car horn beeped across the road. Helga was right on time, driving a big red and cream Hudson Terraplane convertible. The one with the bullet-in-a-ring hood ornament, which I've always wondered about, having that kind of mind. She waved me to hurry over, and

I did, glad of a closer look. Her tight yellow sweater emphasized rather than concealed the nicest set of headlamps ever to stop traffic on Sunset Boulevard. She slid across the seat, accidentally flashing a lot of ivory inner thigh above dark stocking tops. "Hi, Muscles. You drive. Southeast corner of Pershing Square."

I swung a U-turn wheelie into the traffic, and ignored the horn-blasting. "What's down there, other than low-life?"

"Exactly. According to what I hear, it's where our fine up-standing deacon goes for company."

She steered me to that little park opposite the rundown Gaylord Hotel, where the ladies of the evening were already parading in the morning. We drove past the line-up of short-skirted talent twice, before Helga nodded at a big redhead teetering along on stiletto heels. "That's her, I think."

The sidewalk floozie was bursting the seams of a red satin dress that looked like she'd been poured into--and forgot to say 'When'. The top-heavy top was open down to here, and the skirt was slashed nearly up to there, showing the troops a generous extra ration of fishnet-clad flesh. When I stopped alongside, her professional smile changed to a nasty double-take at Helga sitting beside me. "Yeah?" she chewed suspiciously through a cheek-sized wad of bubble gum. I showed her a photo of Lars, courtesy of the Lutheran Bulletin. "Know this guy?"

"You ain't one of the regular vice squad."

"P.I." I flashed my license.

"So?" she sneered at it. "What's it to ya?" I showed some more convincing credentials, and her purple-nailed claw closed over a five-spot. It was tucked away down her Grand Canyon, nice and warm. "Sure. He's one of my reg'lar johns."

"How regular?"

She frowned so hard in phony

thought, she almost cracked her face, which had more paint on it than the Golden Gate Bridge. "Lemme see . . ." So I gave her another five to line her bandeau, if there was room. "Oh, yeah. Every Sunday night. He never misses." She popped a pink bubble, sneering at Helga. "This'll be little wifey, huh?" Then her mascara lids managed to open wider. "They . . .!" She started nodding, pointing. "Hi, honey. Heading for alimony court, before Clark Gable nails you instead?"

"How'd you like being choked by that cheap red wig, Fatty?" For a moment the strange hard voice on my elegant blonde client made her sound like a sidewalk bimbo herself. I figured we'd learned enough about Lars' little ways for now. So I drove away fast, before a real knock-down skin-and-hair cat-fight developed.

Helga laid her pretty curls back on the seat and gave that sexy laugh. "Oh, Max, your face--!" She had a few more giggles. Then, "You think we can scare him off, now? Tell people about his after-church habits?"

"Could be." I was too busy thinking to say much else until I pulled over outside my office. "Look, I'm kind of late for my guard-dog act . . ."

She just rolled her golden head sideways towards me, those lush red lips slightly parted. I mashed mine down on hers, enjoying the taste, plus the elastic firmness of her breasts against me. "Not yet, Muscles," she whispered. So we went upstairs, and for once I was glad the day-bed was still down. We killed a few minutes.

Ever the faithful protector of my clients, I reached the Rolf place late, closer to one o'clock than twelve. The first thing I noticed was that somebody had finally turned off the garden hose, clear tire-tracks showing in the hardened mud

of the driveway. What bothered me, though, was lack of any cars, plus the half-open front door. I pushed it wider, real quiet, and poked my head inside. Which was stupid, as it let somebody hiding in the hall bop me with Mount Rushmore. Hard.

Pain blazed in my skull, and I rolled around on the carpet, fighting to get my eyes open. Muzzily, I felt a shoe thud into my ribs, and heard muffled footsteps leave. Then I fell all the way into the darkness at noon.

When I came to on the Persian carpet, my watch was close enough to focus. I'd been out half an hour, lying in a house still as death. The first thing I checked was that I was still alive. The second was to make sure my roll hadn't been lifted. Encouraged on both counts, I somehow made it into the kitchen and got my bongo-bongo under the cold tap. Soon as I turned around, I saw her.

Somebody had iced the ice-lady. Three times through the back of that tight silver negligee. She was sprawled in a mess of broken breakfast-things, toast fallen from her hand. She was beautiful, she was dead, and I knew who was responsible. Me.

I spent a long, lousy hour before Gruber and his squad turned up. The lieutenant knelt beside her with the medical examiner, rumbled a few quiet words, then jabbed a thumb for me to go outside. We went and stood on the back porch steps, and he grated, "She's been dead less than two hours. Swell job of body-guarding, Shamus."

For once, I had no snappy comeback. It would have been wasted anyway, as he was busy patting me down. He sniffed my .38 cannon, and gave me the old fish-eye. "Who ya been shooting lately?"

"Hey, Gruber. You know an automatic snuffed her! Spent spells all over the floor . . ."

He grunted, and reluctantly hand-

ed back my gat. He'd have snarled something else, but just then he spotted the shot-out window. Gruber tromped through the flowerbed, after checking nobody else had. No slouch as a cop, he stood up with three brass cartridges in his jaw. "Nine millimeters, like inside. Well?" He jingled them.

"Won't be the ones that killed her." I told him about last night's bushwhacker blasting through the window.

His hard face congealed. "That does it, Max! I told you about holding out on me . . ." He shoved out his mitt. "C'mon, the license. Lifted, as of now . . ."

"Listen, Gruber!" I had to talk fast. "I'm handing you the whole case. All wrapped up. The killer--motive--evidence! The works!"

Lars' smooth face looked like it'd walked into a few fists lately. Not the first time it happened to creeps pulled in my Gruber's squad. His spiffy suit was rumpled, and he was shaking pretty good when they took me in to face him in the squad room.

"You again!" he screamed. "The goon that teaser used to set me up!"

I owed him another one for that. Ursula deserved something better than being bad-mouthed by this Brylcreemed lump of lard.

"You backshooting, slimy, psalm-singing creep!" I yelled. "Cruising for broads at the Gaylord every weekend. The same fleabag you wanted to drag her to--!"

I lunged and sank my fist deep into his fat gut. A couple of the Homicide dicks reluctantly pounced on me. When I finally quit arm-wrassling a uniformed bull, Gruber shoved me into a neutral corner.

"Cut the song-and-dance, Snark!" The lieutenant didn't want any time wasted with this one. When the bereaved Rolf had been brought back from 'Diego he was noisy, and even better-connected downtown than we

realized. The Mayor's Office was after the Homicide Department for a fast indictment, and every L.A. newshound was yapping outside the door.

"We got you cold, Snark! Threatening letters. The murder-weapon--your so-called stolen Lahti found in the bushes. Even your tire-tracks from last night in mud outside her door . . ." He sighed, almost bored with such an open-and-shut case. "Ahh, come clean." He nodded at the stenographer. "A full confession could make things easier on you." That'd be the day, I thought. Sure as green apples, this guy was headed straight for a last quick whiff of cyanide in San Quentin.

"I'm innocent, I tell you!" Lars crumpled his bruised face, close to tears, whimpering. "I want my attorney . . ."

"Yeah, sure, Mac. Soon as you co-operate . . ." Gruber jerked his head for me to beat it. When I left, he was peeling off his coat, growling, "Listen, punk, you want this the hard way . . .?"

The afternoon papers already had a beat with screamer headlines--"Sex-Crazed Church Deacon Slays Blonde Society Beauty!" I read the whole schmeer right through. L.A. loves a good murder story. The newshawks had done a thorough job of covering the background, too. How big-shot Mr. Rolf was nearly out of his mind with grief, coming on top of heavy business worries. Sensitive as ever, the papers even made a thing about how much dough he'd got from his dead wife's insurance. Disgusted, I threw the *Times* in the back seat, and parked behind the big two-tone Terraplane outside my office.

It seemed a good idea to visit Sorley's first before I went upstairs. Most of my roll was stashed safely back of my filing cabinet, but I was carrying plenty enough to buy a badly needed bottle of

firewater. The fat barman on duty didn't even want to sell me any, at first. Maybe his boss, Moe, was worried already I'd start running up another tab or something. I leaned on the guy, until he reluctantly took my dough, but in small bills, he insisted.

Seems like this wasn't my day for the trust of colleagues. Earlier, I'd bumped into Rolf Rolf behind Police Headquarters, where he was hiding from the mob of reporters. "Call yourself a body-guard!" he yelled. "Incompetent jerk! If I had my way, you wouldn't be paid a nickel!" Funny, though; I got the hunch his heart wasn't really in it.

Instead of planting my knuckles in his movie-star moustache, I guessed I deserved some of his cracks. I let it ride, even though Helga was sitting there in his big car, hearing every word. She gave me a pale smile, and I leaned in to give her a quick kiss. She jerked back though, and shot a warning glance behind me. Rolf was bearing down, both dinky fists cocked, chalk-faced with rage. I took off, before I got too tempted.

Now, though, Helga was waiting for me when I went up to the office. Slumped on the day-bed, having a good bawl. Somehow, her nose didn't go red like most dames' when they really cry. I let her make with the waterworks, her deep sobs doing spectacular things to the pert domes pressing roundly against her organdy blouse. Finally she rested, sniffing, on my shoulder.

I kept one hand busy, cracking the foil on a brand new quart of Calvert. "Join me, sugar?" She nodded helplessly, then gave me those brimming blue eyes full-bore. Next thing I knew, we were in a clinch, tears and lipstick all over my ugly mug, while I juggled not to drop the bourbon. Five whole bucks it cost me. In ones.

"Oooh! You must think me awful! At a time like this--!"

I gave her a stupid grin and a medicinal shot of booze. She knocked it back fast as a stevedore, which drew my blink of admiration. Helga glanced at me, then quickly shuddered. "Golly, I'm not used to anything that strong!"

More slowly, she started sipping the refill I offered. "Max . . . Do you think he'll really be convicted?"

"Huh?" I got more comfortable beside her. "Cinch. Motive. Witnesses. Snark's a gone goose." Maybe we should talk about somebody worthwhile, and I raised my shot-glass. "Ursula . . ." She bit her lips at that, and gulped more bourbon.

"Uh, how come you two have, had, different names?"

"Not now, lover." Moist eyelashes fluttering, her fingers trembled on my biceps. "Max, she's gone. What am I going to do?"

"C'mere," I suggested.

She did.

She hardly stirred beside me when MacDonald's call came through about eleven that night. He sounded both happy and relieved, a guy whose final investigation went well and he was leaving the job anyway.

"Easy--a piece of cake!" he said, sounding like an RAF pilot already. Wasting no time, he started giving me the local story, chapter and verse. Just clearing up loose ends. His strong voice squawked out of the phone, and Helga stirred in her sleep. I looked away from the distraction of her gleaming bare shoulders, and tried to muffle his cheerful loudness as much as I could.

After he finished, I must have stayed silent a tad too long. "Hey, you still there, Yank? . . . Got enough to be going on with?"

Somehow I said plenty, thanks, promised to forward his fee, and wished him happy landings. MacDonald laughed, like he was going to a party instead of fighting Mes-

serschmitts, and hung up. There was a guy who wouldn't miss being a P.I. one bit. After a case like this, I knew how he felt.

For quite a few beats, I watched the neon changing color across her beautiful skin. She was gorgeous. Innocent-looking as a baby. "Okay, Helga," I said. "You can open your eyes now."

"Huuuh?" She rolled over, yawning, managing to let the sheet slip away distractingly from lush, milky-white contours.

"Cut that out!" I yelled. The naked blonde twitched her sheet higher, managing to look sleepy and puzzled and hurt, all at the same time. "Lover, what . . .?"

I threw on my shirt and pants, those pools of blue following my every move. Then I got myself a shot of bourbon, to calm down. A double.

I took it over and sat down, put my heels on the bed. "Was it those newspaper stories--about me being such a no-talent detective? They finger me as the perfect dumb-dumb for the job? Or did you have the idea already, and I just turned up right when you needed a patsy for an alibi?"

"Honee . . .?"

She was watching my eyes all the time. Not many people know to do that. Especially demure, well-brought-up little Icelandic girls. "I . . . I just don't get all this . . ." The sheet slid well down the slopes of alabaster hills. "Lover, you're talking kind of crazy!"

"Yeah? Funny, I think I'm making sense for the first time since you wiggled in here . . . Why'd you really do it, huh? Just the dough--like it always was with you?"

"Max . . .!" Looking sad now, she still breathed my name like a promise.

"Listen, dammit!" I threw the shot-glass against the wall, then gripped her by the shoulders. "Stop playing games with me!" I shook

her perfumed body like you would a rat. "You and Rolf bumped your sister off--and used me to frame Lars for the rap!" She squirmed free, somehow, and I went across the bed after her, a red rage misting my eyeballs.

I grabbed her round the throat. "All that malarkey . . . the loving little farm-girl from Manitoba protecting her big bad sister! Jeeze! Well, MacDonald found out plenty. About a teenage chippy with hot panties who ran away from home with a feed-salesman to Montreal. Within a couple of years, she'd been busted by the vice squad in every tourist trap from Quebec to Toronto. Had a rap sheet, yay-long--streetwalking, larceny, even passing U.S. counterfeit bills. Remind you of anybody, sweetheart?" I squeezed her tonsils a little. "Huh?"

She made weak choking sounds, so I let up some. "Ducked that jail-term pretty good, didn't you, Helga? Something about snapping your garters at the right judge, Mac hears. Anyway, right about then you contact Ursula, and she gets you down here. Free to start a new life. Safe and sound from the Mounties!"

Her head went up, and she gave me the look you give a sidewinder just before you stomp on its head. Her lovely eyes had gone flat, cold.

"So what's a grateful sister to do? Just to show your appreciation. Yeah, why not crawl in the sack with her rich husband first? Then give him the idea to blow holes in her beautiful back! Was it only the dough--or maybe plus some old-fashioned girlish jealousy! Was that it?"

Still the flat stare.

"Sure, it all ties in. Rolf with the moustache--what that Pershing Square floozy called your 'Clark Gable' boyfriend! A missing Lahti, that Lars couldn't prove was stolen. The convenient garden hose running long enough to get a set of Lars' car tires in the

mud . . . Then, once Bodine was forced out of the house, no more chance of a witness. So all you had to do was just delay me long enough for Rolf to pull the trigger!

"Jerk P.I. was a pushover, right? . . . That make you laugh, huh?--" I shook her some more, even harder this time. Maybe I did hit her. She went limp, blonde hair flying.

"Okay, okay!" she screamed. She shuddered in terror, cupping red-tipped fingers, protecting tender flesh. "Okay. Just don't hurt me!"

I snapped out of it then, and reared back, giving the kid some air. Which was all the chance she needed to pull that vicious little nickel-plated automatic out of her purse. She jacked around into the chamber, thumbed the safety catch down, and pointed the tiny rod straight at my heart. There wasn't a sign of a tremble then. From her, anyway.

"Not so tough now, huh, Muscles?" she sneered. Hefting the Baby Browning, Helga eased back more comfortably into the pillows, tucking the sheet tight against herself. "Well, Big Boy, you really loused up! You could have had it all. The publicity about being a great Dick Tracy private eye . . . oodles of well-heeled new clients wanting to hire you . . . and later on, a share of everything from Ursula's will--with me for icing on the cake!"

"Huh? What about Rolf? He's the one who inherits the dough."

She smiled lazily. "Temporarily."

The neon flashed off and on a few more times. Then I said, sort of careful, "You mean you'll need some more help--to help you become a widow soon after you're a bride?"

"What d'you think, Mister Detective?" She licked her lovely lips, and arched her back, making a little sigh of mean pleasure. The gun never wavered, though. "Why else would I let that creep put his

slimy hands on me? Why'd I even help him bump off my own stepsister?" She made with her Veronica Lake laugh.

"She was always such a goody two-shoes . . . But a few waggles of that hotsy-totsy rear-end, and she'd glommed onto a millionaire husband. Millions she had, while she fed me peanuts for pocket money. And I always knew anytime I crossed her, she could've blown the whistle real fast . . . threw me back across the border to the Horsemen!"

"So where does that leave you and me?"

She smiled dazzlingly. "Me rich, and you . . . rich, too. If you play it smart. If not—" The shiny barrel lifted. Then her voice went husky with temptation. "Come on, sugar. Easy dough. Just keep your trap shut, help me send Rolf-Rolf bye-byes, and--"

The door slammed open, bouncing off the back wall, and a guy came through it with a gun. "You lousy little tramp!"

There was no cover for me, scrunched there in a corner chair with my feet on the bed. Now there was another gat in the action--Rolf's snub-nosed .38 revolver--two gun muzzles to worry about, both pointing deadly black O's at my gut. But Rolf's attention was mainly on the blonde.

He snarled, "Figuring to double-cross me too now, huh, Helga?"

"Sweetie, how could you?" she wailed. "Oh, thank God you got here!" She was a better actress than Greta Garbo. Even I could have believed her. Almost.

But with him, it was no soap. "Don't give me that gaff, you chip-pie! I've been outside that door long enough to hear the works!" Helga's chrome purse-gun started to slide in his direction. He caught the move, and jagged the stubby Chief's Special at her, thumping the hammer.

"Drop it, Helga!"

She eyed him that calculating

way she had, and saw he meant business. The near-naked bimbo sighed, and shook her head like she was humoring a kid. In sweet surrender, she casually flipped the little gun aside. It landed not six inches from my right shoe.

"Know what happens now?" You could hear his teeth grind, like there was sand between them. He gave a half sob, and pointed the gun at her heart. His knuckle started to pull the trigger. "You first, Helga, you two-timing--!"

Then she dropped the sheet. All the way to her waist. For a full second, he hesitated, staring at the dazzling loveliness of her naked twin alabaster mounds. It was plenty long enough for me to grab that pearl-handled toy Browning Firecat and pump three .25 slugs right between his eyes--CRACK--CRACK--CRACK!

I guess men have died with worse last views.

It was maybe two days later when I sobered up in a fleabag hotel room, and decided I could face my office. I was in no shape to deal with what I saw there, so I took a powder to a 'phone miles away.

"Hi, Gruber. Seeing I just made you a big hero over a certain homicide case, maybe you can return the favor--"

"Where are you, Shamus? On second thoughts, never mind." He went silent, which isn't like him at all.

"Not at my office, for sure. Dunno why, but there's two palookas with baseball bats hanging around the back entrance. Care to shoo 'em off the doorstep for me?"

"Uh-uh. They'll be from Sorley."

My head was pounding bad enough, without this malarkey. "What's gotten into him lately?"

"Listen, you're in deep trouble, feller. Sorley's sworn out the complaint against you." He wheezed for a long moment, then, "Passing counterfeit bills!"

"Whaaat?"

"Iron-clad case, looks like. Sorry, pal. Could get you five to ten with no parole."

"Wait a minute, Lieutenant--!"

"That bill you palmed off on Sorley for a grand." His voice was stony. "Near perfect engraving. Almost undetectable, except for the cheap ink. In this heat, it rubbed off all over Moe's fat mitts." A gravelly rasp of amusement, "Geez, he's madder'n'hell at you, Max!"

Sure. That purple guck on my hands; off Abe Lincoln's picture, not Bodine's suitcase. Those counterfeit scams of Helga's, years ago. She'd kept a few old samples of funny-money for emergencies. Like for hiring a dumb down-on-his-luck detective.

"Dammit, Gruber--that Hellstrom dame paid my fee with it!"

"What if I even believe you? She's facing a life stretch in Tahachapi. Won't likely sweeten her testimony on your behalf."

There was a long pause, while I wondered what Alcatraz would look like to me from the inside.

Then he snarled, "Listen, gumshoe. Strictly speaking, counterfeits a federal rap. So I got to inform the FBI first." His voice

got harsher than ever. "This being Sunday, there's no good calling those choirboys at their office 'til tomorrow. But you just better be waiting when the G-Men come for you, Maxim. That's my official warning!"

There was a kind of a long thoughtful silence.

"Thank you, officer. I appreciate it." What else could I say? "Uh, Gruber, maybe we'll have a couple bourbons over this someday. On me."

"Yeah? Well, meantime, keep your nose clean--Percy!"

So the girl with two big ones won after all. I seemed to hear that gurgling sexy laugh. Guess I always will. No wasted time for regrets, though, or to risk going back to the office for my bankroll. Hocking my car again snagged just enough dough to buy the longest Greyhound ticket you ever saw, with a dozen changes en route. Here's my bus now, first stage all the way up to the border. Then one more ride, points north, to Gimli airfield.

Maybe Pilot Officer MacDonald could use a volunteer rear-turret gunner on his Wellington. So long. See you around.

anything, anywhere, anytime

by Pierre Comtois

Horst Schacter brought the PC-6 Pilatus Porter down for the perfect three-point landing, and began the short taxi up the concrete runway to the Air America terminal. From the control tower, there could have been no evidence in the landing that its pilot had just returned from an eighteen-hour run into the rugged Laotian back country with only a half-hour stop for refueling and reloading at Pnomh Penh.

As the AA terminal loomed up before his windshield, Horst nosed the craft into its slot and watched as the ground crew disappeared beneath the plane's fuselage. He cut the craft's big turbo-prop engine and pulled off his headset, shaking the cobwebs out of his head and squeezing the sleep out of his eyes. The thunk and clank coming from the rear compartment told him without his looking that his copilot and cabin crew were even then unloading the return trip cargo; as anxious as he was to get home and sack out for a couple of days. He dragged himself at last from his seat in the forward cabin and stooped out across the deck and hopped out of the cargo door. The concrete outside was hot even through the leather of his boots and the Laotian sun beat down unmercifully onto his unprotected head. But as much as he would have liked to jump onto an outgoing jeep and home, he still had to take a look at his ship. After all, if he had to depend on it for his life every day, it better damn well be in flying shape.

He turned and almost bumped into Christ Tebert, his ground mechanic who had just given the plane a quick

run-through. "What's the eyeball check say, Chris?"

Chris smiled and said, "Had it a little rough today, didn't you?"

"Uh oh."

"Yeah, the wings are so loaded with lead, it's a wonder you brought the bird down at all. And that tail section . . . where is it?"

Horst groaned. If the Pilatus Porter was as beat up as Chris indicated, he wouldn't be able to fly for his next jaunt. That meant reassignment to another of the Company's planes. Probably a Dornier or one of the older Caribous. He hated those big planes. The reason he insisted on getting a Pilatus Porter for his missions was its remarkable ability to negotiate the extremely short dirt strips that AA pilots were frequently required to use in the highlands. Thousands of feet above sea level, the tiny fields were situated on the sides of lonely mountains and plagued with high winds that more than once sent the best of pilots plunging over the side of cliffs. But the Pilatus Porter, by dint of its sturdy Swiss design and high wings, was able to take full advantage of the fierce winds and bring the plane down almost vertically onto the shortest of fields. The only drawback was that it was too damn slow, only managing a speed of 40 to 174 miles an hour. Way too slow for the trigger-happy Pathet Lao rebels that the CIA's army was fighting.

Horst knew the odds for employment with the CIA's secret airline, the Air America organization, was about fifty-fifty for coming back alive, but still, he preferred to

have something in his own favor. The big automatic pistol strapped to his hip was against Company regulations, but none of the pilots took it seriously, and the Thompson sub-machine gun he kept under his seat in the pilot's cabin was extra insurance. Except that, this time, none of that mattered. He spent most of his time in the air, a sitting duck for ground fire the whole trip. As he ducked beneath the ship's belly, he winced at the ragged holes left in its skin as they stitched their way out toward the wings and the near-miss at the engine. It was true, the tail section was nearly gone. He marveled at the remains, evidence of a nearly impossible rocket-propelled grenade shot.

"I guess you'd better get right to work, Chris," he said, shuddering at the realization that he would have to settle for one of the bigger planes for a few days after all.

He found an unoccupied jeep out in front of the terminal and talked its bored driver into taking him out to the Tropic Hotel where he dreamed of his nice, comfortable bed and gently waving punkah. A little bracer wouldn't be at all out of line before lying down as well.

The jeep drove up along the perimeter of the airport for a while, passing almost right beneath the noses of the big Russian Ilyushin cargo planes where they were parked side by side with American Starlifters. It was one of the ironies of the war that both Russian and American planes used the same airport, sometimes the same handlers to load weapons and ammunition aboard their liners, took off to supply their respective clients, and then the returned crews swapped pernod and war stories with each other at the same clubs along the "strip."

The strip was the heart of Vientiane, the capital of Laos. Before the war grew to its present size,

the city was the best place for spending leave in the Far East. It had all the best exotic bars and specialist brothels in Southeast Asia, a man could have the prettiest girls for less than a dime, and the whole atmosphere was so laid back that it reminded most of the American pilots of small-town life back home.

But the jeep lurched to a stop and broke any further reverie Horst might have had. Instead of those good years long gone, he was stuck with the congested city of the present. He invited the driver in for a drink in the hotel's bar, the Purple Porpoise, and the two men left the hot street for the air-conditioned interior.

The first thing that attracted Horst's attention outside of the usual raucous gaiety of the bar was the unaccountable giggling of the nude hat check girl just inside the door. The mystery was solved when he peeked beyond the edge of the counter and saw that the girl's slim buttocks rested snugly over the bald head of Nick Sorello, a helio pilot for AA. He was trying to drink liquor from an upturned bottle but the bottle kept poking up between the girl's legs.

He sighed and looked around for the driver—he was gone from his position at the door, but Horst soon found him with a small gaggle of green American GIs as they put their money down to watch Suzie do her stuff. She was famed throughout Southeast Asia for her ability to smoke cigarettes with her vagina. Well, at least he didn't have to spend any of his money on the driver.

He weaved his way over to the bar where the hotel's owner, Percy Loringham, passed out drinks and kept an eye on things. Percy claimed to be a member of the British aristocracy and affected an accent to prove it, but its authenticity was dubious. It didn't matter anyhow, he hated reporters and if he

caught any in his place he had the bouncer rough them up good. The pilots loved him for it, because they were apt to talk freely of Company business when they drank too much, and enjoyed the freedom from worry in the Purple Porpoise. So it boiled down to the fact that everyone was willing to believe in Percy's genealogical claims.

As Horst bellied up to the bar, Percy spotted him and moved in his direction. "Give me a stiff one, Percy. Something that'll put me to sleep for a week."

"A rough one, my friend?" said the owner, mixing the drink.

"I don't walk to talk about it, Percy."

Percy slid the finished drink over to the pilot and watched him take the first tentative sip. Then he ventured, "Are you that tired, Horst, or are you exaggerating?"

Horst eyed the man with a warning glance. "Why, what do you have in mind?"

"Well, I was going to ask you a favor. After all, I kept your room for you for two weeks last April while you were gone to Saigon. I could have easily given it to someone else during that time. We have no contract between us, after all . . ."

"All right, all right! Just what is it you want? Can it wait until I get some sack time? I'm beat."

"That's the beauty of this favor, Horst. You can complete it for me and rest at the same time."

Horst put the drink down and eyed the man who signaled to a girl who had been hovering on a bar stool a few places down. At the snap of his fingers, the girl hopped down from her perch and moved over to the American's side. Horst looked into her Oriental face and saw the beauty that seemed to reside in most of her race. She was a doll all right, he decided. And the rest of her wasn't bad, either. She couldn't have been more than fifteen.

"I got her from over at the Buddhist girl's school across the street," Percy was explaining. "As you know, I only hire quality girls to work in my place, so I recruit from unsullied flowers. No street women for me." Horst already suspected what was going to be asked of him. "She will do just fine, Horst. Except that she is . . . inexperienced. And as you know, most of my clientele prefer the more confident hands of professionals. I was wondering if you'd do me the favor of deflowering this little rosebud. Surely she isn't so bad to look upon."

The girl sensed the conclusion of the question and said, "You want see show?" and promptly began to take off her clothes. But her inexperience kept her from making it a smooth operation. She fumbled too long with her bra and nearly fell amongst the folds of her dress pooled at her feet.

Horst reached out and stopped her. "Arrete la, ma petite," he said in his execrable French. "Prenez votre robe et venez avec moi."

"Thank you, Horst," beamed the Englishman, happy at the prospect of a new acquisition.

Horst led the girl up the back stairs to his room, not at all happy with the situation. Not because he had any moral scruples with having sex with such a young girl--morality was something he had to leave behind in the real world. It didn't work here where life was cheap and swift. It was a different world here, and the fact that he lived at the very edge of endurance for long periods lent him a sort of ecstatic energy that cried out to be released. No, morality had little if any meaning in this sort of twilight existence. It was, rather, the delay in much-needed rest he resented. He really didn't feel like breaking in another of Percy's girls. Although he didn't do it all that often.

He unlocked the door to his room and ushered in the girl, who walked

in warily, hugging her still undone dress to her bosom. He closed the door and relocked it. The girl turned and dropped her dress again in amateurish eagerness. Horst sighed and reached out, hooking an index finger at the center of the undergarment. Giving it a good yank, he snapped it at the rear and tossed it onto the floor. The girl's first instinct was to hide her tiny breasts in sudden fear. He knew the most important thing for him to do now was to put her at her ease. He smiled and put his arm about her shoulders, squeezing her to him in reassurance. He felt her tiny body shiver against his big frame and undid her arms from about her chest. She dropped her eyes shyly as he examined her in detail. She was a beauty, or at least she would be in a few more years. Maybe it wouldn't be so bad to have a little fumbling sex before bed after all.

He went over to the bed and sat down on the edge. And, pulling off his sweat-soaked shirt, he held out his leg, nodding to his boot. The girl understood and went to her knees before him. Trembling fingers undid the laces and shapely arms wrapped themselves about the worn leather and tugged, at first feebly, then with more strength. Suddenly the resistant boot gave way and the girl flew backward onto her haunches and Horst gave out a good-natured laugh. The girl grimaced and went for the second boot with more determination. She got that one off with more ease, then began to work off the trousers. He was surprised at her initiative but didn't say anything. At last he stood above her and in a sudden move gathered her into his arms, a writhing, giggling mass, and tossed her onto the bed, all arms and legs. He leaned over to wipe the smear of dirt from about her small breasts and eased her panties off. She quieted down then and waited for him.

The next thing he knew it was morning and he was being shaken awake by none too caring hands.

"C'mon, Horst, let's go, I haven't got all day."

Horst sat up, winking the sleep from his eyes, and made out the features of Sam Fitz, Major Sam Fitz when he was on base at Tak Le. But right now, out of uniform, only Sam Fitz. Horst only saw the man for one reason, and right now he didn't want to hear it.

"What time is it, Sam?"

"Eleven o'clock."

"A.M. or P.M.?"

"It's in the morning, Horst," answered Sam impatiently. "Are you gonna get up or what?"

"Eleven in the morning? That's only seventeen hours of sleep! I thought I told Percy I wanted to sleep for a week."

"Percy was the one who let me in. He said it'd be okay. C'mon, I've got a job for you. We have to leave now."

Despite the banter, Horst knew there was no arguing with Sam Fitz. He was with the CIA's black operations unit at Tak Le air base from where the Company launched its most secret and illegal missions. Horst was one of the few pilots on their top security clearance list, and as such was supposed to be always on call. He sighed and swung himself out of the bed, exposing his bedmate as he did so. She was still sleeping soundly, completely exhausted for her first rounds of love-making. "I'll be right with you, just let me get a quick shower and change."

Sam grunted and sat down.

A few minutes later, Horst emerged from the bathroom as Sam looked up from the month-old Newsweek he was reading. It was as if the nude girl on the bed was invisible. At least until Horst gave her a good smack on the behind. At the contact, the girl shot up with a shriek, tumbling off the bed onto her rump. Horst kicked her dis-

carded clothing in her direction as she rubbed her sore backside and gathered the proffered garments with the other. In another moment she was being herded before the two men and out the door into the hall. Confused at first, she began feeble protests as she realized she was going to be pushed from the room without being able to cover herself. Horst locked his door and left her in the corridor to the stares and laughs of the other boarders. Her final lesson in the life she chose to lead.

Vientiane was considerably subdued as it neared the noon hour, compared with the early evening of Horst's arrival the day before; and so, Fitz's jeep was able to cross the city to the airport with little trouble. As he passed into the air base proper, he filled in his passenger. "I've already made arrangements for your absence during the mission. You're taking some leave time in Bangkok."

Horst nodded. "What's the mission this time? Another hard rice drop?"

"Sorry, can't tell you just now. John will fill you in on the details when we get to his office."

Horst didn't answer. It was to be expected. Black Ops were the super-secret missions of the U.S. government. Usually illegal. And very dangerous. If a pilot were shot down, his people didn't know anything about it. But AA pilots took it in stride. They were used to chances. What they couldn't tolerate was frugality. And so, the CIA paid them a lot more than the usual rate for the work.

Suddenly the jeep pulled up at another gate. This was the entrance to Tak Le, the CIA's private air base completely sealed off from the outside world. Security was tighter than a rat's ass. Nobody got in or out if the Company didn't want them to. The mean-looking sentries checked the two men's iden-

tification and let them pass. John Stelant's office was in a low, nondescript building alongside a big hangar that was always guarded by a small army of Marines with orders to shoot on sight anyone who came within three hundred feet of the building. Although Horst never saw the big hangar doors open, he knew that they hid the presence of an SR-71 Blackbird, the CIA's number one spy plane. Horst felt the familiar stirring in the pit of his stomach as he contemplated the opportunity to fly that baby. Someday . . .

The jeep stopped and Major Fitz led him the short distance to Stelant's office. "Horst," greeted the CIA man as the two men entered his office, "glad you could get here so quickly."

He knew as well as Horst that if he didn't, Fitz had orders to bring him along under arrest, but he didn't mention it. Instead, he said, "No problem, John. Now what's the emergency this time?" He sat down in one of the two chairs facing the desk without bothering to wait for permission.

Stelant circled his desk and got right to it. "It's simple, Horst; all you have to do is make a night drop tonight at the coordinates we'll supply you with."

"Will I have ground signals to mark the target?"

Stelant cleared his throat and said, "Well, this time you'll have to land and unload, Horst. . . . Now, now, I know how difficult it'll be without lights or radio contact, but there'll be a force of Mayo tribesmen and a Green Beret Alpha team to signal you in with flashlights."

Horst still didn't like it. Why couldn't he just drop his load?

Settling on the edge of his desk, Stelant gave him the full story. "You see, there's an important general in the North Vietnamese army that lost a wife and daughter in the war before full-scale troop

commitment by the U.S. in the South occurred. He was told by the Communists in the North that they were raped and killed by U.S. advisors seven years ago, supported by manufactured evidence. In any case, the general learned to hate the South and has fought for the North ever since. But a few weeks ago we managed to track down the supposedly dead daughter. That's right, she's alive. That Green Beret team you're to meet has kidnapped the general from off the Ho Chi Minh trail and brought him to these coordinates." He handed Horst the notes. "Your mission is to get his daughter to him as soon as possible. Hopefully he'll see the light and come over to our side."

Horst stood up to face Stelant. "Okay, I can see the importance of the mission. But that still doesn't make the night landing any safer . . ."

"Of course it doesn't," said Stelant coolly, "but does \$10,000 help?"

Horst's eyes widened. "It'll help. How about my plane?"

"Your favorite, a PC-6. Fresh from the Factory."

The Factory was the CIA's maintenance/depot base on Taiwan, the largest such facility in the world outside the U.S. There, thousands of technicians "sanitized" aircraft for the Company's Black Ops. Hundreds of the Company's people lost sleep at night worrying about downed planes being traced back to the U.S., and so they routinely erased all serial numbers and brand names on every part of the plane they purchased or "borrowed" from the USAF. But the process was so slow and exacting that they found it easier to build their own planes from scratch. The result: completely unidentifiable aircraft. That, and false commercial markings, markings taken from destroyed aircraft, and triplicated markings on several different aircraft, insured total confusion by anyone attempting to

trace any of the Company's planes.

"Let's go," said Horst at last.

Horst took a long, careful look at the Pilotus Porter before giving his okay to it. He knew it would fit his personal criteria, but force of habit had saved his life more than once. Just as he was finishing up on the outside of the plane, a small party of three approached from around the aircraft; Stelant, Fitz and a woman he did not recognize. He assumed the woman to be his passenger, and as she walked up to him with the others he allowed his eyes to wander over her features.

He was immediately struck by her incredible beauty. He knew most Oriental women were attractive, at least to him, but this woman, who could not have been more than twenty-five, the prime of an Eastern woman's allure, was irresistible. Almost as tall as he was, she was clothed in ordinary cammies with her jet-black hair held at her back in a ponytail. She stood mutely as Stelant introduced her.

"Horst, your passenger, Miss Ouan Dinh. Miss Dinh, your pilot, Mr. Horst Schacter."

Ouan looked up at him and bowed her head slightly. "How do you do, Mr. Schacter," she said in perfect English.

"Good, Miss Dinh. Shall we take off?"

"Don't waste any time, do you, Horst?" said Stelant.

Horst shrugged and helped Ouan into the plane through the cargo door. Just as he followed her in, he noticed for the first time a group of a dozen metal drums strapped against the opposite bulkhead. "Hey," he called out agitatedly, "are these drums filled with homemade napalm?" Homemade napalm was the bright idea of an overreager CIA agent. It had the same effects as the real thing, but was a lot more dangerous to handle.

"Yeah," said Fitz from outside

the plane, "we didn't have time to unload the stuff from the last mission. You don't mind, do you? I mean, for the money we're paying you . . ."

Horst didn't answer, but simply herded Ouan toward the co-pilot's seat. Once settled in, he fastened her seat belt and slid the cargo door shut and assumed his own place. It was in no time at all that the PC-6 was in the air and on its way.

Some hours later, as twilight began to fall, Horst relaxed and said to his passenger, "So, what's the story of your life?"

Ouan looked over at him and smiled. "A very uneventful one, Mr. Schacter. As you know, my mother was killed by the Viet Cong for refusing to attend one of their political meetings. I was sure to die as well at their hands, until an old woman risked her life to whisk me away. Later she deposited me into the care of a Buddhist orphanage until I left as an adult to work for the government. It was there your fellow countrymen found and identified me. Now all I want to do is see my father once more, whether or not he wishes to change sides. And you, what is the story of your life?"

Horst laughed. "Even less exciting than yours, Ouan. I grew up in a small town in West Germany, learning English watching old American movies. When I turned seventeen, I joined the United States Army and became a citizen. While there, I trained as an assault helicopter pilot and in my spare time got my commercial flyer's license. After that, I quit the army and worked as a bush pilot in Argentina for a couple of years until a friend of mine in the employ of the U.S. government pulled some strings and got me reupped into the service. And here I am."

"Well, you . . ." began Ouan but was cut off then by her host.

"Sorry, Ouan, but no more talking--it's night now, and with no

radio or radar, I've got to find my way to the drop zone by going from mountain peak to mountain peak." He slipped on a pair of night goggles. They helped but were no substitutes for radar.

It was a harrowing way to fly, but despite himself Horst was actually getting used to it. In another couple of minutes he sensed the approach to his destination and began a wide curve, waiting only for the final minutes to elapse before the prearranged arrival time. He was pleasantly surprised to find that he hadn't guessed too far wrong. Off to his right he could see the first lights wink on, then spread down in a ragged double line, marking off the invisible dirt runway. Now began the most dangerous part of the mission.

"Brace yourself, Ouan," he cautioned the girl. "If I'm off it could be any kind of landing!"

He began the long, slow curve that would place him at the head of the runway and, using the dim, starry horizon for perspective, brought the craft downward toward the blackness below. The landing gear clunked down and he felt the air resistance as it sought to keep the plane aloft. He softly blessed the Swiss designers of the craft who had built it with high winds in mind. Bringing the ailerons all the way down, he managed to bring the plane to an almost complete halt, until he was hovering over the land below. The stretch of lights had foreshortened into the distance and he knew the ground to be no more than a few dozen feet beneath him. At last, the moment came when he had to relinquish any real control he had over the plane as he let it find its own way the rest of the way down. A soft bump, and the aircraft rolled bumpily along the dusty strip until it came to a slow halt. Horst cut the engines and breathed a sigh of genuine relief.

He turned to the girl and saw

that she was staring at him. "I cannot believe it!" she breathed. "You landed the plane absolutely blind!"

Horst smiled with concealed pride but affected the AA pilot's air of confidence. "C'mon, I do that all the time. It was nothing."

The girl merely shook her head as he undid her seat belt and helped her into the rear. He pushed open the cargo door and jumped down onto the reddish soil of Laos. He instinctively felt for his gun at his hip and turned to grasp the girl by the waist and bring her to the ground.

"Well, I wonder where the welcoming committee is?" he asked.

And as if in answer, a voice called out from the darkness surrounding the plane. "You will remain right where you are. If you make any sort of untoward move, you will be shot immediately."

Horst tensed involuntarily, recognizing the hostility in the voice, and not liking it at all. But there was nothing he could do, as a half-dozen flashlights had been focused on him. He raised his arm in the only defiance he could muster to shade his eyes against the glare. It didn't help.

"You like to take chances, do you, American?" said the voice as its owner lumbered into view at last. He was a big, beefy man in the uniform of a North Vietnamese Colonel. And his followers were similarly dressed. Now Horst really had a bad feeling about this set-up.

Rough hands searched them and stripped Horst of his gun. And a surprised yelp from one of the searchers around Ouan shattered any hope he might have had that in the darkness the girl might have escaped identification. A rapid conversation in Vietnamese followed between the Colonel and his subordinate until the former strode forward and grasped the girl by the scruff of her neck and drew her face into the light of his flash-

light. He guffawed in amused delight at his discovery, saying, "A woman! This is a surprise. Leave it to you Americans to bring along your whores into combat! Spoiled bourgeoisie! But she will not go to waste. I will free her from the oppression of capitalism and show her the delights of Marxism; and in the true spirit of Communism, when I am finished with her, she may be shared among the men." Then he laughed a good-natured laugh and barked orders to his grinning soldiers.

What had happened to the Mayo tribesmen and Green Berets he was to meet? And how did the Vietnamese know of the mission? Thank God, the Colonel did not seem to know the true significance of Ouan's presence with him. But as it stood, her fate was not going to be any easier! He had to think fast, before Ouan could be violated by these fiends. But any plans he might have formed died aborning as the sharp rip of tearing fabric wrenched his tightly wound nerves.

As a few of the soliders kept the two covered, another had torn the leggings of Ouan's trousers from her legs, exposing the lily whiteness of her featureless limbs. Amid general hilarity at the girl's discomfiture, the soldier tore the two legs of the pants apart and with one, tied the girl's hands behind her back and with the other, tied Horst's own arms along a length of bamboo stretched across his shoulders. As the men finished, the Colonel returned with a loop of leather and a long cord. Chuckling, he fastened the loop around Ouan's neck, and holding the opposite end of the leash, gave it a tug, urging the girl on. "A leash for our little pet!" he laughed. Another tug sent the girl to the stony ground with a whimper. Still tugging, the loop digging into her flesh, the Colonel forced the girl to fight to her feet or be choked to death.

It was all Horst could do to keep himself from lunging at her oppressor. The fire kindled in his heart toward this beautiful creature in the short time they had been together in the plane surprised even him. He had known scores of women in his life, and never had any of them affected him in this way. It was a new sensation for him. But one that was destined to be frustrated because of the predicament they now found themselves in.

It was almost dawn of the following day as the band of soldiers and their exhausted captives clawed their way through the undergrowth of the highlands. It was all Horst could do to keep placing one foot in front of the other. After several hours of stumbling and falling along the uneven ground in the darkness, and in the unnatural manner he had been tied, the American was more than ready to drop. How his companion had kept up the pace, he did not know. Of course, that damned noose around her pretty neck was good encouragement. Because she had been brought to the fore of the column by the Colonel, Horst had not been able to see Ouan. But her heart-rending groans of pain as she fell and the constant stream of pathetic pleadings for mercy filled the night before him, and he shuddered at what condition he would at last find her in the morning.

And as the rosy dawn at last tinged the eastern sky, the column of men filed into what Horst could see was a Mayo village, with all the signs of a recent battle. So this was what happened to the Berets. They were probably followed from the Trail and ambushed here in the village. So there would be no rescue for Horst and Ouan. He would have to manufacture his own succor. And he would—he had been in tough escapes before and gotten out of all of them. This

would be no different. Yeah, right. At least he didn't see any sign of bodies about the camp. Maybe there was reason to hope for rescue from the escaped Mayos?

He had little time to think on the prospect as he was led to one of the only three huts left standing in the village and shoved into its musky interior. His harness hit the flooring on its tip, jarring him to the bone, and forcing a cry of pain to escape his lips. As he settled down onto his back, he sensed the presence of someone else in the room with him and looked over to see Ouan as she struggled to rise to a sitting position without the use of her bound arms.

Horst squeezed his eyes shut at the sight of her. All scratches and bruises, her once immaculate features begrimed with mud and dust, her long legs bloody at the raw knees. What was left of her cammie shirt was hanging on by a single button and her cotton panties clung wetly to her skin.

"Did they . . ." Horst managed to croak. "Did they . . .?"

"Not yet," she replied in a voice so strong that it embarrassed the American, making him ashamed he had not borne up as well as she.

"But I have decided during the night to deny them at least some of the vile pleasure they would take from my position. Each time I fell to my knees, each time I was dragged naked along the trail, each time I endured the laughs of the men, I vowed to keep the one thing I could deny them." She paused to catch her breath. "Mr. Schacter, I would like you to make love to me." She rushed on before he could make any reply to the extraordinary request. "I want my first time with a man to be with someone I can at least respect if not love. Oh please, Mr. Schacter, will you do it?"

Great, thought Horst, was he doomed to break in fillies all the time? Still, he could understand

the desperate desire in the girl to claim some sort of control over her fate, even one as degrading as this. "I'd like to comply, but in my condition it won't be easy," he said at last. "The way we're tied won't help any, either."

But the girl had an answer for that as well. "Stay on your back and let me move up to your hand. Take hold of the edge of my undergarment and wait as I try to squirm free." Then Horst watched as the girl got to her knees and placed her hips within reach of his bound hand. He hooked his fingers within the warmth of the soiled cloth and held on as the girl wriggled upwards past his hand, working the panties to her knees.

Finally she stopped and moved to sit with her back to his crotch and, with not too much difficulty, managed to undo his trousers and pull them down far enough for her intentions. Turning, she lowered her body onto his and whispered almost in his face, "Thank you." She slid down, settling across his loins.

Night was falling again. As the shadows lengthened and the interior of the hut darkened, Horst glanced over to where Ouan was lying on her side. She had slept for most of the day; when she was awake, light sobs seeped from her lungs, tearing at the American's heart. Since their coupling the night before, they had not spoken a single word to one another. Their captors had reassured them of their continued presence with the arrival of a single rancid meal near noontime; the rest of the time Horst had spent straining against the ropes they had replaced at his wrists, but with little gain.

For the thousandth time he was pondering what had happened to the Green Berets and what their captors had in mind for the ultimate disposition of him and the girl, when movement from outside the hut ar-

rested his attention.

In another moment two soldiers had entered the building, spied Ouan lying on the floor, and moved toward her. Again rough hands seized her and fastened the noose about her neck. She made an effort to resist, of course, but to little advantage. Untying her hands, they stripped the shirt from her back, exposing her breasts. At once she began to resist furiously, but her tormentors merely laughed and dragged her outside.

Struggling with the desperation of the hopeless, Horst fought his way to his feet and went to the doorway himself. He arrived there in time to spy the Colonel as he stood on the little stoop before his command hut directing his men to fetch buckets of stagnant rain water from a barrel in the village. The girl was left standing in the village square, her tiny-seeming figure bent and filthy, her arms ineffectually protecting her bosom. Around her, a score of soldiers gawked and pointed as others arrived with the buckets. Moving right up to the girl, they each doused her roughly with their contents, turning the caked dirt and blood on her body to mud. With an order from the Colonel, the girl began absently to pass her hands over her limbs in an effort to clean up. But the Communist's ardor was too poignant to be long stymied. Being handed the leash, he jerked the girl in the direction of the hut. Stumbling up the wooden steps, she disappeared inside.

With that, Horst began at once furiously pulling and tugging at the bamboo pole that was still tied across his shoulders. But all his efforts were wasted. At last he stopped long enough to notice several short poles standing across the middle of the one-room hut. At one time they had been intended to support blankets separating the room into two. Moving quickly to the central pole, Horst turned his

back to it and slipped its tip up between his shoulders and the bamboo pole. Bracing his feet far back and leaning forward with all his might, he concentrated on bringing his hands together before his face.

For many minutes he strained there in the hot silence, fearing all the while the sudden entrance of a guard. But more than that, the horrid visions imagination insisted on showing him of the girl's plight. Sweat sheened his skin and dripped in rivulets from his face before he sensed the first kink in the joints of the bamboo. Suddenly he was on his face on the floor of the hut and paralyzed as he waited for the investigating guard. But no guard came, and so he busied himself with ridding his wrists of their bonds.

Quietly he searched the hut for the trap door he knew was always present for the handy disposal of rubbish and human waste. He found it handily and fell through to the ground below. Immediately he saw the calves of a guard as he walked up to the rear of the hut and, positioning himself near the edge of the building, swung out savagely with a stiffened arm at the backs of the guard's knees. The man fell at once, hitting his head against a rock as he did so. In moments, Horst had acquired an old-fashioned assault rifle with bayonet from the fallen guard and had moved to within twenty yards of the entrance of the Colonel's own hut.

A single guard stood outside just below the doorway; from inside, Horst could hear the weak protestations of the girl as she fended the advancements of the North Vietnamese. Revenge and murder filled the American's brain as he suddenly launched himself from the shadows and vaulted across the open space toward the guard. But his charge was too swift for the Vietnamese to counter in any way. Before he could call out, the butt end of Horst's weapon had broken his jaw

and the pilot had dashed into the hut itself.

An electric lantern revealed the girl as she was being forced onto a flea-ridden cot, her soiled panties in the process of being lowered by the Colonel who had positioned himself between her legs. But any thoughts of proceeding with his intentions were dissipated as he saw the American's face twist in a rictus of hate. In another moment, the Colonel's belly was filled with a foot of steel and the whimpering girl had been gathered into the pilot's arms.

But there was no time to waste-- the camp would soon discover the evidence's of Horst's actions. Scooping up the belt containing his own automatic from a table, Horst grabbed the girl by the wrist and hauled her through that hut's waste trap and so into the jungle just outside and to the building's rear.

Pausing only to allow Ouan to adjust her underwear, the two escapees plowed their way through the thick jungle in the direction Horst's infallible sense of place had determined lay the Pilotus Porter. For he had long since decided that the plane could supply the only hope they had for escape. They couldn't have any chance of surviving for long in the jungle, hundreds of miles from anywhere. The only trouble was that the Vietnamese would probably conclude the same thing. Horst figured their only real chance lay in that the other soldiers wouldn't discover their absence for another few minutes; enough time to allow him and the girl to reach the far side of the village and a deal beyond along the already forged path to the airstrip. He would handle any guards left by the plane when he got there.

He was beginning to congratulate himself near dawn as the trees up ahead of them cleared, indicating the presence of the field, when Ouan showed definite signs of heat exhaustion. He knew it had to come

--the woman had withstood hardships that would have knocked out many men in the past few days; it was a miracle she had held on as long as she did. But now, he could just hear the sounds of pursuit, and with the plane so near, he knew they had to make it now or never.

Since he had been half carrying the girl for hours now, it was only natural to go all the way at this point. Smoothly he left her to his shoulder in a fireman's carry and loped off toward the clearing. He smiled to himself as he felt the girl try to help him all she could by wrapping her arms about his waist. Good girl!

Finally he broke into the open and saw the CP-6 sitting there pretty as you please, without a guard in sight. Maybe there was one around, but he could not take the time to investigate. He pulled the automatic pistol from its holster with his free hand just in case and dashed to the aircraft.

The cargo door was still open just as he had left it, and he didn't waste a second as he approached it and dumped Ouan inside like a sack of potatoes. He was just about the follow himself when suddenly stars appeared before his face. It was a moment before he realized he had been struck from behind. Instinctively he wheeled and, fists flailing wildly, he fought desperately for a time to clear his head. He felt his blows landing solidly against unprotected flesh, and when his sight did clear, he saw the bloody remains of his attacker lying supine on the ground.

He didn't waste time congratulating himself, though, but climbed into the plane. He was helping Ouan to her feet when he spotted the drums of napalm where they were strapped against the bulkhead opposite the cargo door. An idea formed in his head then and he turned to the girl. "Ouan, can you hear me?" The girl nodded feebly. "I'm going to strap you against the side of

the plane right next to these barrels." He pushed her against the wall and strapped her in in a standing position with another heavy-duty strap as he spoke. "Listen carefully, Ouan. I'm going to get the plane in the air. When I'm ready, I'll yell out; when you hear me, give this strap"--he gave her the end of the strap that held the drums fast--"a good yank. Then hold fast to the wall. Got me?" Suddenly her eyes were alert and she nodded purposefully. Once more in command of herself.

Wasting no time, Horst dashed to the pilot's seat and revved up the engines. A glance at the nearby trees told him the strong mountain winds were with him. Thank God for that! Slowly, agonizingly, the plane wheeled into position and began to lumber down the runway. Tick, tick, tick! and a spider-webbed hole materialized in the left windshield. Cursing, Horst saw tiny flashes from just within the tree line as the approaching enemy tried to stop the plane before it left the ground. But they were too late as the aircraft skipped upward and caught the wind. Horst jerked the nose almost completely verticle and the plane shot straight up into the air. Pushing against the left floor pedal, he forced the plane into an extremely tight curve that brought it directly over the hidden troops. With its wing span at a perpendicular angle to the ground, Horst shouted to the rear: "Now, Ouan, now!"

He didn't see the girl obey his command, but he heard the clunk and clatter of the exiting metal drums as they skidded down the vertical cargo deck and fell out of the open doorway. In moments, the jungle hundreds of feet below erupted in a gigantic inferno as the homemade napalm roasted it for miles around. Horst could imagine its effects on the Vietnamese; even if they didn't burn, they'd smother to death as the oxygen in the air

was burned up by the flames.

Slowly he straightened the plane and pointed it toward Vientiane. Satisfied, he turned and shouted over the noise of air rushing in from the open cargo door, "Ouan, undo the strap and come in here. But be sure to hold on tight to the handholds just in case. I don't want you falling out now!"

In another moment he sensed her presence as she squeezed into the cabin and sat down in the co-pilot's seat. Horst looked at her and shook his head. She was naked except for her panties, whose elastic waistband had snapped, allowing them to settle too far down below her hips. But it didn't matter much, as she was so covered in dirt, blood and sweat that he could barely make out the color of her skin. Her breasts jutted out boldly from the rush of cold air whipping in from the open hatchway and they made Horst remember his flight jacket he had tucked down between his seat and the side of the plane. He dug it out and handed it to her. "Better get this on."

She took it silently and shrugged herself into its sheep's wool, saying, "Do you think my father . . ."

"I think he's alive and that he'll be out of the bush with the Green Berets two days after we get back. I never saw any evidence of deaths while in the village. And if those guys are alive, they'll get out in one piece and everyone else with them. Believe me."

"I do believe you . . . Horst."

"Say, that's the first time you've used my first name!"

"How else am I to address the man I've come to know so . . . intimately?"

"That was a sloppy job back there," admitted Horst. "I don't want you to think, being a first timer, that it's always like that . . ."

"I didn't think it was," she replied. "So perhaps you can show me how it is properly done while we wait those two days for my father?"

Horst just smiled. At least this time it won't be with a beginner.

Continued from p. 48:

out on. Still, we can all thank you for bringing the 30s into the 80s in your own inimitable style and giving us "Julie de Grandin" to boot or whatever.

Stuart McLean
Kent, England

I received and devoured Risque Stories #5 in one setting--wild stuff! "Hellcat of Hong Kong" by Cerasini and Hoffman was the best; these two can really dish out a great pulp yarn! I trust more from their pens will be forthcoming.

"They Saved Rockwell's Brain" by that great pulp impostor himself, ol' N. Leo Lancer, was fine 50s

"macho" fun brought up to date, crazy stuff that could only find a home in RS.

The Wellman yarn was slight, but well done, and REH's poems, while not among his best, were interesting.

"The Spicy Strips" by Will Murray, that popular potentate of pulp pornography, is another "bang-up" job! What a researcher! These great old strips are matched only by the strange "Julie de Grandin" from your own Risque. I liked Robert Knox's art on this better. When is Julie going to meet Linda Lovecraft?

Daniel Gobbett
Riverdale, MD

Glenn Lord is nearly done compiling a first-line index to the Spicy pulps, but a few items still elude him. Can you supply any of this information? If so, please write us here at Risque Stories. Please supply table of contents and first line of each story.

SPICY DETECTIVE: 1939—January
SPICY WESTERN: 1939—March, September
1942—January
SPEED WESTERN: 1946—September, October
1947—July
SPEED MYSTERY: 1944—July, November
ROMANTIC DETECTIVE: 1938—August
ROMANTIC ADVENTURE: any (if this even exists)
SUPER WESTERN (ca. 1934): any
SUPER-DETECTIVE: 1934—June, July, September, November
1935—February, March, May, any after July
(But not the new series beginning in 1940)
SNAPPY ADVENTURE STORIES: any after May 1935
SNAPPY MYSTERY STORIES: May 1935, any later
SNAPPY DETECTIVE STORIES: any after May 1935
THE LONE RANGER: 1937—May, June, July
SPEED WESTERN: need first line of "Quarantine Corral" by Jim
Brent in 4/47 issue
SPICY DETECTIVE: need first line of "Make Mine Murder!" by
Wallace Kayton in 6/39 issue
SPEED DETECTIVE: need first line of "Murder's Happy Honeymoon"
by L. Donovan in 3/44 issue
SPICY ADVENTURE: was there a Diana Daw strip in the 12/41 issue?

the spicy westerners

by Will Murray

It took quite a while for Culture Publications to bring forth the fourth and final member of their infamous Spicy chain, Spicy Western Stories. One wonders why. After all, Western pulps were unquestionably the best-selling genre pulps during the Depression. It would seem to have been a natural.

Mysteriously, not only did Culture wait until the end of 1936 to release Spicy Western Stories, but the very idea seems not to have occurred to them earlier. When, after the release of Spicy Detective Stories in 1934, the publishers slapped together dummy "ashcan" editions of Spicy-Adventure, Spicy Mystery, as well as Snappy Detective, Adventure and Mystery Stories, they did not deposit in the Library of Congress the required copy of a Spicy Western Stories to prevent upstart publishers from running off with that marvelous title.

Was it that the Western was too American, too noble a genre to sully with what they euphemistically called "romance"? No, for, as everyone knows, the real historical West was not called wild because cowpokes seldom bathed. Dancehall girls and brothels were a big part of frontier life, too.

It may be that the reason was more practical. First, Frank Armer and his cohorts simply didn't think of it. And second, when they did, they had a hard time finding writers who could juggle gunplay and foreplay at once. After all, the pulpsters who wrote Westerns were not a specialized group. Those who could handle the spice were not necessarily the same folks. In the pages of Spicy-Adventure Stories

the occasional Western story appeared for several years before the advent of Spicy Western. But filling an entire issue with shoot-'em-ups every month was another matter.

Culture/Trojan did in fact announce a Western title circa 1935, but it never materialized. It might have been a Super-Western to go with their Super-Detective and Super-Love Stories. Then again, they might have started assigning the first Spicy Western Stories, only to shrink from this daunting task. We'll never know. When Spicy Western Stories finally rode down the trail, it sported a typical H. J. Ward cover and a logo that all but reduced the word "Spicy" to an optical illusion. The masthead changed to the more readable and permanent one with the second issue.

Although the cover story of the November 1936 Spicy Western Stories went to Stuart Adams' "Arizona Kid," the honor of the very first Spicy Western story went to E. Hoffmann Price's coffin-faced Simon Bolivar Grimes. The story was called "Tenderfoot." At that time, Grimes is barely a man, his voice tending to crack at times. According to Price, "Thus far, he had never more than vaguely suspected white women of having legs; just skirts and feet." That would soon change.

Four pages into the story, the reader is treated to the deflowering of Simon Bolivar Grimes at the hands of a Creole dancehall belle named Lorette:

"Grimes followed twinkling ankles and swaying hips up the narrow one-way stairs. He was afraid of Lorette, so frail and dainty. . . .

"She was now quite close, and his awkward hands were conscious of the filmy stuff that still clung to her skin. Women were very wonderful and mysterious . . . he was glad he didn't have to speak . . . he'd not have known what to say.

"Then her lips found his mouth, and her arms insistently drew him toward her. . . .

"Later, though his voice still cracked at times, it was a full grown man who told Lorette about Uncle Carter and the Box-A ranch."

Elsewhere Price, who enticed Robert E. Howard to write for Spicy-Adventure Stories, has admitted to modelling Grimes after Howard's Gent from Bear Creek, Breckenridge Elkins, and named him after another Howard Western character, Buckner J. Grimes. As for Hoffmann's own Grimes, he hailed from Kennesaw Mountain in "Gawgia." That's Georgia to those who don't speak Dixie.

Grimes first rode into view looking for his Uncle Carter's Box-A ranch. He stumbled upon trouble and kept stumbling upon it, usually led by a mischievous female, until he became a hunted outlaw. Most Spicy Western word waddies would have settled for that old chestnut--and many of them did--but Price refused to allow Grimes to stagnate. He actually got to his uncle's ranch a few stories later, in "Skeleton Creek Feud" (May 1937). It was not a happy homecoming. Uncle Carter is being set upon by rustlers, and the first night Uncle Carter catches Simon in bed with his cook's daughter, the colorfully named half-breed Susie Wrinkled-Meat. Simon rides off to look for work and ends up in the middle of the rustlers who are bothering his uncle. By that time, everything is straightened out, and Simon is riding again. He has to. His uncle can't stand his footloose, "shootin' fool" ways.

Years later, when Grimes is still roaming the trails, flinging lead and lifting skirts, his uncle con-

tinues to pester him by mail. Or maybe it's another uncle, because these letters are signed "Uncle Jason."

"Dear Nephew Simon," began one friendly missive, "I'm plumb sick and tired of yore sandalus (sic) and disgraceful cuttings up. Inside of a year, you kilt more people than Genl. Sherman. Feud shootings is one thing and plain quarrelsum is something else. I sure would admire for you to become a credit to yore folks back to home. Like yore Cousin Buckner Diggs, that's a jedge back in Athens. If you do, you inherit my ranch and cow critters."

Yore affectionut unkel,
James Grimes, Esq.

P.S.--I hope to Gawd they hang you the next time you butt into a fight that ain't yorn. If they don't, and I ever ketch you, I'll whale you within an inch of yore life.

Affectionutly, etc.
J. C."

And so in that story, "Professional Ethics" (March 1939), Grimes tries to become a lawyer. It's a career he has some difficulty sticking with, as you might imagine. But he was still lawyering a few issues later in "Too Many Clients" (May 1939), and presumably this represented a distinct phase in Grimes' checkered career, which included occasional appearances in a companion title, Romantic Western.

Price's tribute to the memory of Robert E. Howard did not stop with Simon Bolivar Grimes. In the April 1937 issue, he introduced Blaze Buckner in a story entitled "Devil's Mill." Buckner lopes into Las Cruces and within two paragraphs ends up in bed with ravishing Maude Hillis. Then her husband barges in. It was a trap. Of course. No self-respecting Spicy Westerner ever bedded down a married woman unless he was snookered into it.

Buckner is a saltier character

second adventure, "Hero of Coffin Creek" (June 1937), Buckner is trying to identify a girl by a birthmark high on her leg. He's explaining how he knows about this birthmark when the following exchange ensues.

"What's that, yuh lyin' ---ing ---!" howled a voice in the corner. He was Short Horn Johnson, the express company clerk.

"Who's a ---ing ---?" bellowed Buckner.

"He whirled, deceptively fast. And as Short Horn tugged at his holster Buckner landed, blocking the draw and hammering him with his fist. It sounded like a thunderbolt finding board and lodging; but the echo of the crash that tangled the profane man with a cuspidor and two chairs had scarcely ceased reverberating when Squint Eye and a companion came piling into action.

"The latter yelled, 'Yuh kain't hit my pardner, yuh ---- ----!'

"I done knocked the --- loop legged," Buckner politely retorted, ducking a chair Squint Eye tried to smash across his head."

Most of the other writers settled for "consarn its" and "goldarn its," peppered with the stray damn and hell. Not Price. He probably typed in the correct Anglo-Saxon, leaving the editor to fend for himself.

Buckner was simply a drifter always on the prowl for woman-flesh and somehow not as interesting as Grimes. Not unusual for the Spicies, the byline on this series fluctuated. The first story was signed Hamlin Daly. Thereafter, Price's own name asserted itself.

Another gunslinger who got his start in the first issue of Spicy Western Stories was Mort Lansing's Ebony Duane. He earned his nickname from his black gunfighter's suit and blacker horse. Although a good guy, he wore a black hat. Even his saddle was black. He earned his reputation with his .44 Colts. "Vengeance Trail" was the

title of his first adventure. Having split up with his trail buddy, Ebony rides into town where Fagan, owner of the Silver Dollar Saloon, offers him quarter interest in the place just to hang around. Fagan figures his fearsome reputation will scare off the riffraff. Kate the voluptuous dancehall girl manages to convince him to accept the offer. Somehow.

Naturally, Ebony gets into more trouble than he expected. Also naturally, he shoots his way out to help his friends. His exploits were recounted every few months for the first couple of years of the magazine. He had an interesting background. He was raised on a border ranch by a Mexican, Papacito Gonzales, and often dressed in dark Mexican clothing. When Gonzales was murdered in "Loop of Gold" (January 1937), Ebony donned a single gold earring which he refused to remove until he killed Gonzales' killer. The author claimed this was an old gringo custom, but being a lifelong gringo myself, I never heard of it. In some ways Ebony Duane was similar to the Sabinas Kid, Jose Vaca's long-running Spicy-Adventure character, except that the Sabinas Kid was a true Mexican. He didn't wear an earring, though. But he liked to snip off the ears of people who crossed him. Despite the different bylines, both series seem to have been penned by the same author.

Not every Spicy Westerner rode alone. And not every Spicy Western writer stuck with one name.

The team of Shadow Morgan and Buck Hope first appeared in "Guns in the San Pablos," by Stewart Gates (January 1937), and returned one issue later in Stuart Adams' "Hired Guns." One supposes this means that Gates and Adams were one--but which one may never be known.

Buck Hope narrated the stories in a hokey first-person voice. In his premier story, he goes in search of Shadow Morgan and with the help

of the Singing Comb, rescues him from a Mexican jail.

The Singing Comb wasn't a stray talisman left over from The Lord of the Rings, but a blonde Mexican woman who--but let Buck Hope describe her:

"In case you all don't savvy the Singing Comb, she was a slick-breasted little Mex who didn't wear nothing much under her skirt but one red garter and two red sandals at the under end of them. She was always sitting on the floor cross-legged, so anybody could see how top-string her legs were, and always combing her long yellow hair and humming to herself."

The Comb was fickle. In the first story she had a thing for Buck. But in the second she announced, "Me, I have no like same man all time. I too damn cute," and rode off into the sunset with Shadow Morgan. It didn't seem to hurt their friendship any. A few years later, "Guns in the San Pablos" was reprinted as "For Good Measure" (December 1940) under the house name Stan Warner. For some weird reason, the characters' names were changed and the story converted to third person. The Singing Comb became a blonde named Rita.

Robert Leslie Bellem had elsewhere created a zillion recurring Spicy characters, but as far as I've been able to determine, he never conjured up a cowpoke who rode through more than one Spicy Western story. I think because maybe he couldn't take the genre seriously. (Even though in later years he would script some TV Westerns like The Lone Ranger.) I infer a lack of empathy for the Wild West on Bellem's part from the relative absence of his multitudinous bylines in the magazine and the opening paragraph of one of his few Spicy Western stories, in which his nominal hero rides up to the Lost Poodle Saloon. Either that, or this was a Dan Turner reject he rewrote for this market.

For a while in 1938, Trojan issued a Romantic Western. It was advertised with the line, "We believe that in Romantic Western we have been successful in bringing back to vivid, throbbing life the story of the frontiers of the West." From which one guesses that it was as hot as the Spicy version. Although you didn't find a lot of double-entendres in a Spicy Western story, there were times when the cowpoke hero said, "I holstered my hog-leg," and you had to go back and reread the paragraph to understand exactly what he meant.

For all its red-blooded interludes there was a certain bowlegged charm to the cowpokes of Spicy Western Stories. A lot of them were modelled after Billy the Kid, with the emphasis on Kid. There was Mort Lansing's Cotulla Kid, Clint Morgan's Sundown Kid, Stewart Gates' Durango Kid (no relation to the later comic book hero by that name) and others. Most of them were on the run, having been framed for crimes they didn't commit, or were riding the vengeance trail because old dad's ranch had got torched by nasty bushwhackers. They weren't as hardbitten as the lay-'em-and-leave-'em crowd over at Spicy Detective. But neither were they as naive as the assorted Kids who populated Street & Smith's Wild West Weekly. In fact, a lot of Spicy Western stories ended with the hero stuttering, "Aw, shucks, ma'am," and dragging the gal to the nearest preacher.

It should be mentioned that Spicy Western Stories was very liberal in what it considered a Western story. James A. Lawson's oil-field troubleshooter, Dallas Duane, aka the Hard Guy, long a mainstay at Spicy-Adventure, Spicy Detective and Private Detective Stories, resurfaced in Spicy Western in 1937. The fact that he rode a Plymouth and not a palamino and tangled with G-Men mattered not at all to the Culture editors. He operated in

Texas and Oklahoma and that was good enough for them.

In fact, it was hard to tell when some of these stories actually took place. When the unavoidable snarling, moustachioed Mexican brute clutched off the lovely damsel's dress, sometimes an old-fashioned corset and stays were revealed. Other times the Buffalo Gals wore bras and panties. And if you took the story illustrations seriously, nylon stockings were plentiful in the Old West circa 1870.

Another puzzling thing about Spicy Western Stories was the bad guys. There were a lot of Mexican banditos, and when the plot required a sultry femme fatale, a Mexican senorita was produced. If an alien culture ever stumbled upon the same issues of Spicy Western I've sifted through, they would never have guessed that cowboys once shared the plains with Sioux, Cree, Comanche, Apache or any other indigenous native persons. One would suspect an editorial taboo against cowboy/Indian maid romances at work, except for the rare exceptions.

Alan Anderson's "Big Red Roan" (June 1937) was one such exception. Lars Lamont, a veritable Viking of a cowboy, teams up with an Indian maiden named Waquisa to rescue his girlfriend, Maureen San Carlos, from the evil Hollis Hoke. Alone on the prairie with Waquisa, Lars experiences what might be called a moment of epiphany:

"'You die for this girl,' whispered Waquisa. 'You love her. Waquisa love you.'

"Lars looked at her. He was shocked, surprised. 'But I . . .'"

"'Red girl; white man. Bad. Now, no. Just man, woman, now. Waquisa save Lars. Lars love Waquisa now?'"

"Lars blinked. He'd never thought of Indians as being just people. But now her dark eyes were liquid with tears; her lips parted and wet. He kissed her. She put her

arms around his neck and crushed his chest tight against hers. Why, he thought, she's just a woman like any woman. Her savage ardor kindled his. His kisses grew avid. And he wasn't being disloyal to Maureen. It didn't make sense. But in his heart he knew it to be true."

Spicy Westerners were wonderful rationalizers. Waquisa, of course, dies a brave and noble death; with her out of the way, Lars can rescue Maureen and plunge into another passionate scene.

No discussion of Spicy Western Stories could be complete without a recapitulation of the career of Polly of the Plains. She starred in the magazine's required two-page comic strip. Educated in the East, Polly returns to her father's ranch just in time to fall into the clutches of Pancho, the half-breed, who covets the ranch--not to mention Polly. From there, it's a Perils of Pauline roller-coaster ride of strippings, whippings, and assorted near-consummations with unsavory types. Polly had a friend, Joan Dawson, who lost her clothes nearly as much as Polly. The series was unbelievably hokey. One caption actually read, "Meanwhile, back at the ranch"! The presence of a G-Man named Ken indicated that readers were not being treated to historical verisimilitude.

The first two installments of the strip were by Bill Everett, who signed his work "Michael," and then departed to create the comics character Prince Namor the Sub-Mariner. Joseph Sokoli then took over the strip, which petered out in 1938.

Polly of the Plains got into sordid situations undreamed of by her Spicy Detective sister, Sally the Sleuth. In fact, as a whole, Spicy Western possessed a definite sadistic bent. The earlier Spices exhibited a similar slant in their first two years, but had been considerably tamed by 1935.

Why Spicy Western would exhibit

such tendencies is unclear. Perhaps it was a counterpoint to the relatively chaste heroes it served up. To compensate, the villains had to be especially mean. If you glance through the line illustrations in a stack of Spicy Westerns, two themes recur. The good cowpoke stumbling upon the bosomy cowgirl bathing in the ol' watering hole, bubbling stream or, as in one variation, using a waterfall for a frontier shower. The other recurring motif is the whip, or alternately, the white-hot cattle brand. Whipping scenes were so common that it was a rare issue that didn't contain one scarlet example, lavishly spotlighted by a fevered illustrator. Branding scenes usually involved the breasts, for some reason. The tormentors were almost always Mexican bandits--although there was the odd girl-whips-girl scene. Spicy Western's torment tradition carried into story titles, too. Classic examples include "Barbed Wire Love," "Whip-Branded," "The Wife Buster" and others.

Humor was not absent from Spicy Western, either. And E. Hoffmann Price was not the only one to play fast and loose with the Western tradition. There was James A. Lawson's "Owleye Baba and the 40 Beeves." Don't ask me about the plot. Lawson also had a character called "Barb" Wire, and another dubbed Smoky Knight. Mel Davis had a character he called Whirl Arrow and Clem Tucker called one of his waddies Lew Arrow. Luke Terry's Johnny Golightly adopted a new name, Rance Daniels, when he took the owlhoot trail--the better to be taken seriously, no doubt.

One suspects the contributors

to Spicy Western Stories were not the same word-wranglers who wrote for the other Spicies in many cases. The magazine is full of names that never graced other Culture titles--names like Link Durham, Jean Beaumont, Wayne Hollis, Fred Lipton, Jesse Platt, Ross Putnam, Cal Sprague and others. Probably some of these are honest to goodness Western pulp writers taking advantage of a new market. But the only true Westerner I ever heard of who admitted having written for Spicy Western Stories was Alan R. Bosworth, and his Spicy byline is not known.

Alone of the Spicy chain, Spicy Western Stories, because of its late start, possessed a unique distinction. It was the only Spicy to live as long as a Speed title as it had as a Spicy. When the Spicies folded with their December 1942 issue, only to be reincarnated with new names and numbering systems in their January 1943 issues, Spicy Western was exactly six years old. Speed Western ran for five years, ending in 1947.

When Speed Western finally bit the dust, very few of its many series characters were still slapping gals as well as leather. By that time, Trojan started releasing a posse of tamer cowboy titles like Leading Western, Blazing Western, Western Love, and the like. It could be that many of the lustful lead-slingers of Spicy Western Stories mounted these new titles for a while before ultimately riding into the sunset. If they did, no doubt they kept their hog-legs holstered more often than not. The 1940s pulp Wild West was not nearly as wild as the 1930s Wild West, Spicy-style.

slippery as an eel

by Audrey Parente

Miss Wilson didn't wear clothes. She was a nudist. I say "was" because she bought it with a bullet in the boob. The story was related to me by a fellow who called himself Edward Schultz. His name, of course, was not Schultz any more than it was "Clark Crosby or Bing Gable," but he was the correspondent telling the story. The story was told in October 1937. But now, I have finally unraveled the whole mess.

Let me tell you about it.

First of all, the story about Editha Wilson's nudity was told in an issue of Spicy Detective Stories by this Schultz fellow, who let me know he is actually The Eel, a steadily appearing character who related interesting adventures in the old Spicy detective pulps from time to time. The story title of Editha Wilson's demise is "Death Wears No Robe."

Now, Editha was a nudist, and for a while this Eel fellow went around the country with a special show intent on "educating" the world to nudism. "And," The Eel said, "if you think she [was] there to give you an eyeful, you are very lowbrow." Miss Wilson was a class act, dignified, with a great and lasting message of importance. Well, so claimed The Eel.

And when Miss Wilson caught the bullet, no other woman seemed to be able to carry on the nudity with the same dignity--except for Carol Cartwell--according to The Eel.

So, who is this Eel character, anyway? Well, he is a macho man who, he reminds his readers, "has no time for nonsense" and "is at times very handy with his fists."

The Eel, of course, is one of the old Spicy's popular fiction characters, invented by a marvelous writer, one who could slip sex and nudity and sensation into a manuscript without having it be the least bit sleazy or slimy. Sensational? Yes. Thrilling? Yes. But almost always believable, despite gross exaggeration.

The writer? Justin Case. And who, pray tell, is Justin Case? None other than the marvelous Hugh B. Cave, author of over eight hundred pulp tales (only a small fraction as Justin Case, the pseudonym he invented for use in the Spicy line--including Spicy-Adventure Stories, Spicy Detective Stories, and Spicy Mystery Stories).

In 1937, when Case wrote "Death Wears No Robe," he was a successful full-time pulp hack, making a good living at his trade. He had been writing for more than ten years, having started as a teen in the early 1920s doing essays for his school papers, poetry for all types of publications, and short stories for the Sunday School papers. And by the time Miss Wilson, the nudist, made her pulp appearance, Cave had been selling stories to the all-fiction newsstand magazines for at least eight of those years. Why in the world would he sneak in a pen name the likes of Justin Case?

"At the time, I was working like hell to get into the slicks, and I didn't think the slicks would take too well to a writer for the Spicies," Cave says, and adds, "But I needed the money."

"Some were sold out in the open, but most of the Spicy line was sold under the counter," Cave recalls,

"but they were paying good money."

Cave remembers that some of the Spicy yarns brought up to 3¢ per word, and he could "knock out a story in a day." So he could "pick up a good check," but Cave was afraid to lose the respect of the editors of the other pulps, where his name was held in high esteem, and where his work was readily accepted. Nor did he want to spoil his chances in the better paying slick magazines (then using a wide range of fiction regularly--unlike current newsstand magazines which use little fiction, or at best short formula fiction aimed at special interests). How much better paying? Well, where Cave was earning \$200 and \$200 for a short story in the pulps, he eventually earned \$2,000 and \$3,000 for his stories in slick magazines like Cosmopolitan, Family Circle, American, Country Gentleman, Redbook, Liberty, Woman's Day, and Saturday Evening Post, to name a few of the many he sold (over 350 stories to more than a dozen magazines and periodicals).

For the Spicy line Cave, as Case, became The Eel, who would only give his name as "Edward Schultz" in "Death Wears No Robe." Cave's identity was concealed completely. Pretty slippery. In 1977 Karl Edward Wagner, in compiling a collection of Cave's short stories, discovered the identity of Justin Case. But not until Pulpcon 1983, where Cave and Robert Bloch were co-guests of honor, did Cave reveal that he was the sole owner of the Justin Case moniker, which had always been thought of as a Spicy "house name."

The style of writing Cave adopted to present his "Eel" tales mimicked a writer he was fond of during the late 1920s and into the mid-1930s, a writer who was a big name at the time--Damon Runyon. Runyan wrote for magazines and did books about gangsters and New York City (including Little Miss Marker, which eventually made the movies). Runyon's style was first person and came

off as rough and tough because of his subject matter, as did Cave's own "Eel."

But not all of Cave's Justin Case stories were told from the point of view of The Eel, as were "Eel Trap" (Spicy-Adventure Stories, June 1936), "Eel Poison" (Spicy Detective Stories, August 1937), "Eel's Eve" (Spicy Detective Stories, April 1942), and a number of other Eel yarns.

Peeper Poole, an adventurous newspaper reporter who always seemed to be involved with some sexy but sleepy sister, was competently described through the eye of his own cameraman, alias Beeny Beeman, written, of course, by Hugh B. Cave, alias Justin Case. The Poole character appeared in "Sleep, Baby, Sleep" and "She Slept Too Long," as mentioned in Will Murray's article "The Spicy Sleuths" (Risque Stories #4, October 1986).

"Purr of a Cat," first published in Spicy Mystery Stories, March 1942, and later reprinted in Karl Edward Wagner's Carcosa collection of Cave short stories (Murgunstrumm and Others), is a Justin Case story. The cat story is told in a similar first-person style as were the "Eel" stories, but the teller is just an ordinary fellow who picks up a not-so-ordinary woman who turns into a feline. That story eventually became the lead story in a German publication of the Murgunstrumm collection entitled Das Schnurren der Katze.

Several other Justin Case stories are in the Murgunstrumm collection, tales told from various points of view, such as "The Strange Death of Ivan Gromleigh," which is simply narrated to the reader by the author, as are "The Caverns of Time" and "Prey of the Nightborn." "The Whisperers" is a first-person tale, ending up with the teller being not a person, but a person changing into a . . . a . . . something.

Some of Cave's stories did appear under house names, as reprints:

"The Crawling Ones" from the February 1936 Spicy-Adventure Stories appeared in a February 1942 issue of the same magazine under the title "Death Box," with the house name Paul Hanna; "Shutgun Ceremony" from Spicy-Adventure Stories, June 1937, reappeared in December 1942 as "For Keeps" by R. T. Maynard; and "Tomorrow You Die," from the September 1938 Spicy-Adventure Stories, was published again in October 1942 as "Dark Outlaw," by William Decatur.

These titles were discovered by Glenn Lord, who has completely indexed Spicy-Adventure, Spicy Mystery, Speed Adventure, Speed Mystery, Speed Detective, and other pulps. Lord was kind enough to share this information with me, after his own tedious research, which he explained involved spotting reprints by "comparing first lines" of each story.

Lord also uncovered "I See by the Papers," a Justin Case story in Spicy Detective Stories (May 1936), reprinted under the title "Headline Bait" in Private Detective, May 1938, as by J. C. Cole; "Mistress of Vengeance" by Case in the June 1936 Spicy Mystery Stories which appeared in Speed Mystery in January 1943 as "Canyon of Fear" as by Max Neilson; and "Cult of the Corpse" from the October 1936 Spicy Mystery Stories which became "Voodoo Madness" under the house name John Wayne in the magazine's December 1942 issue.

By 1944 Cave had sold to some of the slicks, including a story called "Angry Little Sister" to Saturday Evening Post, which is possibly why he was not as private about his Spicy appearances in 1944 and 1945, when several stories appeared in Spicy-Adventure Stories under his own name: "He Knew the Enemy" (March 1944); "Donovan's Island" (July 1944); and "No Man's Island" (January 1945).

One thing that did not change, that does not change, despite any title changes or author-name changes, was/is the distinctive Cave flair for story-telling. Carl Jacob, another prominent pulp author, described Cave's talent as a "nebulous subliminal something," which is about accurate.

The style is as prominent in each of the Justin Case stories published in the 1980s Risque Stories: "Erzulie," in October 1984 ("One of my favorite stories," according to Cave); "House of Dark Desire," in July 1985; and even, or maybe especially "Sixgun Hellcats from Black River," in the October 1986 issue (which is a study in Justin Case by Hugh B. Cave and two co-authors, Charles Hoffman and Marc A. Cerasini, fans of the old pulps).

In "Hellcats," the hero, Justin Case, is alone with Oretina, "the lovely Oretina, with her red, red lips, promising black eyes, and a figure beautiful beyond description. H'm." Who wouldn't smile at such a "nebulous subliminal something"?

Cave's style, in all his writing, has that certain flair, an honesty that even becomes part of his Eel's personality.

Who wouldn't grin at the straightforward comment by Cave--Case--Edward Schultz--The Eel, in talking about Carol Cartwell, the only woman qualified to step into Miss Editha Wilson's barefooted spotlight: "... this time, while I am caressing her and sipping the nectar from her gorgeous lips, I do not worry about how ardent she will become, because after all she will be taking Editha's place as the Queen of the Nudists from now on, and a little practice will certainly do her no harm."

Justin Case did Hugh Cave's career no harm.

Julie de Grandin

PSEXY
PSYCHIC
PSLEUTH

in... THE WILY WEREWOLF

BY WILL MURRAY AND ROBERT H. KNOX



LATER ON...

JULIE—
WHERE THE
HELL WERE
YOU?!

I
T'INK I'VE
FOUND OUR
"WOLF".

BUT I
LOST 'IM WHEN
'E FOUND OUT I
GOT FALSIES
ON!!

WELL, HE
JUST PICKED UP
THE REAL WHORE—
HERS "LOOKED"
REAL TO—

AIEEE!!

THEY RACE TO
THE SCREAM'S
ORIGIN & FIND—

VITE-
VITE!

BOO
HOO

EET
IS MY FAULT
ZIS TIME— I
SHOULDN'T 'AVE
WORN THESE
T'INGS.

-DAMN!!!
RIGHT BEFORE
SUPPER, YET!

MANGLED BUT NOT
ROTTED CORPSE

THE NEXT NIGHT, JULIE SPIES
TWO SUSPICIOUS SILHOUETTES.

HM-

DEVOUT
COWARD

COME ON, ANH?!

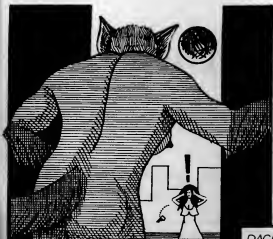
AH,
CRAP!

JÉSUI!!

GUN-LIKE
OBJECT

BETTER
NOT MISS—
SILVER AIN'T
CHEAP!!

WEREWOLF



AS I
SUSPECTED, EET
EES NOT ZEE VICTIM
ZHATEES FEMALE—
WE'RE LOOKIN' FOR
A SHE-WOLF!!

BACK AT JULIE'S WORKSHOP —



MY
DEAR
TROY— I
NOW T'INK
ZIS CASE
CALLS FOR
AN UNUSUAL
APPROACH!



LATHE-LIKE
DEVICE

WHAT'S
THE BIG
RUSH?



THE
FULL
MOON'S
NOT FOR
ANOTHER
MONTH—



WE'RE NOT
WAITING FOR
ZEE FULL MOON,
TROY—



YOU
REALIZE
THIS ISN'T A
LEGAL ACT
AT ALL?

YEAH,
YEAH—

SCHMUCK

(Continued on back cover)

RISQUE REVIEW

Spicy Detective Encores #2 and #3. Winds of the World Press (P.O. Box 921, Framingham, MA 01701). \$3.95 each.

(Reviewed by Stefan Dziemianowicz)

Oh, for the days of the Spicy sleuth: when a beer and a shot cost a quarter and people in the speak-easies blackmailed one another for no less than 20 Gs; when panting goddesses with heaving breasts turned into face-raking hellcats at the drop of a skirt. Did those days really exist? Probably not. But thanks to Winds of the World Press, you can live them as vicariously as readers of Spicy Detective Stories did between 1934 and 1942.

These two chapbooks continue the format established in the first of the Encore series, each reprinting a trio of stories by a single author complete with the original illustrations. Number 2 is devoted to Justin Case's (a.k.a. Hugh B. Cave's) "Eel," a cop turned private dick whose beat extends from Hollywood to Boston and who deals with jealous nudists, a homicidal bride and a rooming-house matron who furnishes "dead" and board. In contrast to the Eel's narratives of first-person savvy, Number 3 carries three stories in the third person by Robert Garron. None are related, except through the characters of those imperiled princesses: a blackmailed model, a doctor's daughter gone wrong and the "thin" child of an embezzler. Both books are about 100 pages long and (as a matter of interest for those foolishly burdened with a sense of shame) measure an easily concealed 4 by 5 inches.

Readers with discriminating tastes take note: Case is a breast

man and Garron, most definitely, a leg man.

Spicy Detective Encores #4, 5 and 6. Winds of the World Press (P.O. Box 921, Framingham, MA 01701), \$3.95 each.

Robert Leslie Bellem, Blue Murder. Dennis McMillan Publications, October 1986. 158 pp. \$6.95.

(Reviewed by Stefan Dziemianowicz)

The Spicy sleuth stood apart from the other pulp detectives by his toughness. And each of the Spicy detectives cultivated his own particular type of tough.

E. Hoffmann Price's Cliff Cragin was tough enough to spit on his predecessors. "Some amateur dick by the name of Poe had written a good one about how to conceal purloined letters," Cragin notes in "Sealed Death." "But Poe was full of nonsense!" Poe goes by the way-side in the trio of stories in Spicy Detective Encores #4. Cragin all but mocks C. Auguste Dupin's safe parlor ratiocination when he drives a doctored race car in "Death Takes the Wheel" and almost dies "the death of a thousand cuts" at the hands of opium-dealing tongs in "Queen of Heaven."

Cary Moran's Jarnegan in SDE #6 is smart-tough, at least in comparison to the terminally dumb Deputy Smirtz and perpetually apoplectic Sheriff Tolliver. He's tough enough to take a beaming from the white slavers in "Murder in the Sheriff's Office"; smart enough to keep Sanderson the hit man and Minnie the maid of "Fatal Facial" distinct from Sanders the chauffeur and Minnie the waitress in "Case

of the Limber Corpse" (gangsters and girlfriends in the Jarnegan stories tend to look and sound alike); and smart and tough enough to dive out the bedroom window every time a jealous husband walks in on him unexpectedly.

In SDE #5, Robert Leslie Bellem's detective Dan Turner is tough enough to look death square in the eye and see a simile. "She was as dead as Grant's Tomb," he notes of an actor's slain wife in "Alimony League." "She was as dead as the Treaty of Versailles," he says when he feasts his glims on the corpse who tried to give him the "Badger Bump." And after popping his "biscuits" at all the "arterial ketchup" shed by the axed actress in "Killer's Cue," Hollywood Dan can't help but remark: "She was deader than fried oysters." (Anybody for a swig of Vat 69?)

Only two things can soften these hardboiled yeggs--fists and females. Both are found in abundance in Robert Leslie Bellem's Blue Murder. Originally published in 1938 (one of two novels Bellem published outside the pulps under his own name), Blue Murder is a novel-length Spicy detective story. To get the extra yardage, Bellem threw in and killed off a few more characters, and then took private detective Duke Pizzatello through all the plot permutations made possible by such higher mathematics.

However, some things might have kept Blue Murder out of the Spicy pulps. One is its raciness. The whole story is built on the mess Pizzatello gets into when he agrees to take on a divorce case so he can earn enough to pay for a one-night stand's abortion (her husband is impotent!). Before you can say "Ka-chow!" Pizzatello is on the lam, accused of murdering his client husband and mutilating his mistress. This leads to some truly brutal interrogation scenes and spicy hot encounters that even Dan Turner might have had trouble standing up to.

What certainly would have kept Blue Murder out of the Spicy pulps is the F-word: Family. Pizzatello marries the woman who saves him! An interesting twist, to be sure, but as Dan Turner might say, "Any guy who lets a skirt do that to him oughtta have his pins shot off!"

Kali-Flower! Sally the Sleuth, \$4.95, and The Spicy of Life!, \$3.95. (Winds of the World Press, P.O. Box 921, Framingham, MA 01701).

(Reviewed by Stefan Dziemianowicz)

Stacked--and we do mean stacked--up against the titillating purple prose of the Spicy detective story, Sally the Sleuth is pure minimalism. She always looks undressed, even when fully clothed. But what Sally lacks in couture, she makes up for in gumption. Kali-Flower! reunites Sally, the Chief and Peanuts for another six adventures in which our favorite comic strip-teaser is almost sacrificed to Kali (hence the title), almost bumped off by a corpse robber, almost done in in disguise as a lady's maid, and almost the prey of poisonous snakes, a pistol-packing monkey and a (wo)-man-eating shark. Those of you who count the frames waiting for the velco to give, take note: Sally stays completely under wraps in "Toy of Fate" but makes up for it with a rare total-topless in "Smugler's Snare." Buy this book only if you're man enough!

Another type of minimalism is on display in The Spicy of Life!, subtitled "a sampler of 50 covers from the 'spicy' pulps." All the Spicy pulps used to carry black-and-white sketches of covers of forthcoming issues, and the folks at Winds of the World Press have made an effort to touch up and reproduce some. To be perfectly honest, they are not much to look at, mainly because they were not much to look at to begin with. Seen in basic

black and white, though, it's interesting to note that the format and design of the covers almost never changed with the issue or the genre. The heroine is always the most prominent figure, fleeing off the lower left-hand corner from some menace. That menace is almost always approaching from the upper right-hand corner: in Spicy-Adventure, it's usually an Oriental- or Latin-looking type; in Spicy Detective, a guy with a gat; in Spicy Mystery, some sort of monster or weird menace; in Spicy Western, some Matt Dillon figure with a hormone overload. Variety is definitely not The Spicy of Life!

Ramsey Campbell, Scared Stiff: Tales of Sex and Death. Scream Press, 1987, 173 pp., \$25.00.

(Reviewed by Stefan Dziemianowicz)

As Clive Barker notes in the introduction to this collection of seven stories, sex and death are familiar bedfellows in horror fiction. All too often, though, it's death on top and sex that assumes the submissive position, put there solely to spice the spicy mystery or to affirm all-too-human vulnerability before something nasty takes a character out of the picture. Readers of Risque Stories would agree that sex as titillation is fun, but there's a lot to be said for sex that is "a central and eloquent part of the story's texture." Ramsey Campbell appears to have been saying some of it for over a decade.

It comes as no surprise that these stories are as disturbing as anything from Campbell's Demons by Daylight years, since five of them were originally published in the mid-1970s. At that time Campbell was perfecting his narrative skill at breaking down distinctions between the inner life of pathetic

ically average individuals and the wretched world outside them. The inability to distinguish between the two is very much in evidence here. In fact, in "Stages" (from 1987), the detached state of a sexual voyeur's mind is equated with his out-of-body experience during an acid trip.

Sex is not merely a part of the narrative in these stories: it defines the obsessive state of mind that motivates and finally overwhelms characters. In "Dolls" the leader of a witch cult exerts his power through sexual mastery of others. In "The Other Woman" an illustrator sublimates his desires until his art begins to assume a greater reality for him (artists are the protagonists in four of the stories, which should give the Freudians a lot to chew over). In "Loveman's Comeback" (no, not that Loveman) and "Lilith's," sexual impulses are so entwined with personality that characters are horrified to find how little control they have when trying to deny them.

Only "The Seductress" fails to sustain the credibility we need at the end of its nightmare. "Merry May" (which may remind some readers of Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery") has an ending that also asks a lot of the reader, despite having been set up competently. What seems more important about this 1987 story is that it is done in Campbell's modern style, presenting a situation that is horribly misread by its main character, much to the delight of others. With luck, that means the topic of these stories is still a concern of Campbell's and that we'll see more of this type of fiction from him in the future.

Footsteps #8, November 1987. (Bill Munster, Box 75, Round Top, NY 12473). 84 pp., \$4.95 (\$6.95 ppd.).

(Reviewed by Stefan Dziemianowicz)

Credit Bill Munster with having the courage to put together an erotic horror issue of Footsteps. Six of the eight fiction selections and all three poems officially qualify. The two best stories are the two most poetic (more so than the poems), and because the most poetic, perhaps the most erotic. In "L Is for Love" Steve Tem uses nary a supernatural element to show how the nakedness of lovers creates its own type of mystery. David Silva's "Shifting Passions" is one of two stories that combines sex and shape-shifting. It's unusual for capturing the playful possibilities of the idea, where Jeannette Hopper's "Under a Hungry Moon" is the usual made-love-to-a-werewolf-without-realizing-it story. The contributions of Elizabeth Massie, Judith R. Behunin and D. W. Taylor are less erotic horrors than revenge fantasies with sex thrown in.

When you're done with the fiction, roll over and read the interviews with Gahan Wilson, Ric McCammon and F. Paul Wilson, and the excerpt from the latter Wilson's forthcoming novel. It beats a cigarette.

Alan Betrock, The 100 Greatest Cult Exploitation Magazines. Shake Books (449 12th St., Apt. 2-R, Brooklyn, NY 11215), \$6.00 ppd.

(Reviewed by Stefan Dziemianowicz)

"Nudists Are a Girl's Best Friend."

"The Fourth Sex."

"The Monster Who Ate Candy."

Titles from a 1930s Spicy pulp? From the 1980s National Enquirer? Guess again. These were just some of the tamer, more general stories

from scandal slicks that proliferated during the mid- to late fifties and early sixties. At the same time American popular culture was equated with Donna Reed or Ward Cleaver, Wally and the Beav, magazines with titles like Police Drag-net, 13 Against the Law and Suppressed were selling a collective 35 million copies a month at the newsstands.

Editor Alan Betrock notes that several things dovetailed to make sensationalist magazines both possible and successful: the end of the wartime paper rationing (the same one that killed the pulps), the flight of Blacks, women and returning soldiers to the cities, and the "high visual" style fostered by a popular new form of home entertainment called television. In the competition to stay alive (most of them didn't survive more than an issue or two) anything became legitimate copy: call girls, groupies and especially celebrities. As this was long before the term "absence of malice" had been created, survival of the fittest was judged by whoever could fabricate the best story on James Dean or Marilyn Monroe.

Betrock has published his choices for the 100 best magazines and 20 runners-up as a durable tabloid and illustrated his paragraph-long summaries with 275 cover photos. This reader's favorite was Celebrities Answer, a seemingly fair-minded magazine that "let" victims respond to rumors about them but that made it clear that not responding could be just as damning. Coming in the wake of the McCarthy era, and the prevailing attitude that those with nothing to hide have nothing to fear, it's enough to cut your chuckle short.

Readers' Rendezvous

Just finished the new Risque Stories [#4] and loved it as much as I did the previous three issues.

"Six-Gun Hellcats from Black River" (phew!) was a lot of fun to read. Not only was it a good adventure story, but its underlying theme of two pseudonyms in search of authors was intriguing. But what I'm wondering is, what happens when they meet up? (hint, hint)

"Murder in Silhouette" was a neat detective tale, something I'd like to see at least one of in each issue of Risque.

"Love Slaves of the Sandinista Torture Squad" was less interesting, maybe because its subject matter dealt too cavalierly with actual serious events. Re: the rape, torture, murder of innocent nuns in Central America. In your other stories, women came into a lot of dastardly situations, I know, but in this case the author uses not faceless unidentifiable females, but specific women of a particular religious order. And Gil's request for sexual favors of the rescued nun was particularly repugnant and outrageously ignorant. No, I think this story did not work. At least for me it didn't.

Sorry, but Julie de Grandin has gotta go!

Pierre Comtois
Lowell, MA

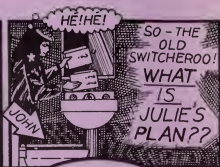
Risque Stories #5 was the most enjoyable issue of the series so far. "They Saved Rockwell's Brain" was the best thing in the issue, so overdone it was frankly hilarious. Some of the images in it were so utterly absurd, it had me chuckling. "The Hellcat of Hong Kong" reminded me a lot of the Conan story "Queen of the Black Coast"; it read like

something by Howard, but a lot better than most of the John Gorman stories. "The Beautiful and Damp" also seemed to be a burlesque to me, but not as successful as "They Saved Rockwell's Brain." The two Howard poems were far superior to a lot of the Howard stuff I've seen reprinted. "A Young Wife's Tale" uses affected language, but somehow you get the idea there's real shame and anger behind it. Possibly Howard based it on some sordid incident he'd heard about (after all, degeneracy used to be a country sport before permissiveness allowed it in the big city, and a lot of those Texas ranchers were extremely remote . . . H. P. Lovecraft and Arthur Conan Doyle can bear me out there). "The Cuckoo's Revenge" was both erotic and, like "They Saved Rockwell's Brain," hilarious. I liked Will Murray's continuation of his "Spicy" history series, and his leading into your own "Julie de Grandin" strip. In other words, I loved the whole magazine. Dare I say you've brought back class and taste to sleazy magazines?

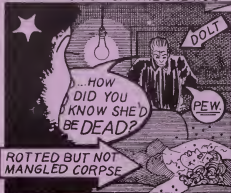
Charles Garofalo
Wayne, NJ

I am halfway through naughty Risque #5. What a wonderful piece "They Saved Rockwell's Brain" is, all those black leather-clad beauties! There is no way I would have fought them, let alone shot them--great stuff. Typical class poetry from the main man R.E.H., a short Wellman story with a suggestive ending, and a highly informative piece "The Spicy Strips" by Will Murray, which left me dreaming of the 30s and all those excellent pulps I missed

Continued on p. 30



... ONE MONTH LATER, JULIE AND TROY CHECK UP ON THE SHE-WOLF.



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**A
COSMIC
JUKEBOX
SCAN**

